

PlayStation

STAR WARS SPECIAL EDITION

DARK FORCES

THE FORCE IS
STRONG IN THIS ONE...



plus

EVERY NEW
PLAYSTATION
GAME REVIEWED
AND RATED

SOUL EDGE
ARMED AND
DANGEROUS

RAGE RACER
BETTER THAN
ANY COIN-OP

MORE THAN
JUST A GAME?
CAN GAMES IMITATE LIFE?

PANDEMONIUM!
THE EXPERT GUIDE

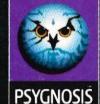
EXTREME PUNISHMENT FOR CARS.

EXTREME PLEASURE FOR GAMERS.



"...HUGELY IMPRESSIVE" PLAYSTATION POWER 9/10

"IT'S DIFFERENT AND IT'S BRILLIANT!
...NOT ONLY MASSIVELY IMPROVED NEW FEATURES BUT SUPERB
POLISHED GAMEPLAY." OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE 9/10



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YOU WILL ATTACK, DESTROY, ESCORT, RESCUE,
DEFEND AND SURVIVE AT ANY COST.

Blast or be blasted!

BLACK DAWN

TM



YOU CAN ALMOST TASTE THE SHRAPNEL!



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ABC
CONSUMER PRESS

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Dark Forces

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The Force is strong in this one

Tipped as one of the ten most eagerly-awaited games of the year, Lucasarts' *Dark Forces* conversion finally strolls in for review. To celebrate the release of the game and the search for the game's mysterious Dark trooper, *PlayStation Plus* takes a look at the Star Wars series, and looks ahead to the imminent release of the special editions of the classic Trilogy.



Soul Edge

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Namco's unbeatable run of stunning fighting games continues as the Japanese version of *Soul Edge* is released. With all the complexity of the *Tekken* series and a handful of weapons thrown in to liven things up, *Soul Edge* is another winner from Namco, but the full SP can be gleaned from our exhaustive review.

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More than just a game

It's a commonly heard tale among kids eager to get their hands on there latest video game hardware that being good at videogames can get them on in life. However, the RAF use complex flight simulators to train pilots, and the gap between video games and such simulators is getting smaller. *PlayStation Plus* digs deep for the truth...



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1997 COULD-N'T HAVE GOT OFF TO A BETTER START, AS NAMCO START AS THEY MEAN TO GO ON WITH RAGE RACER AND SOUL EDGE. THESE TWO GAMES HAVE COMPLETELY REDEFINED THE RACING AND FIGHTING GENRES, AND NOW THE ONUS IS ON OTHER COMPANIES NOT JUST TO MIMIC BOTH TITLES, BUT OUTDO THEM WITH NEW CREATIVITY.

STEVE MERRETT,
EDITOR



Obviously the majority of fighters in *Tekken 3* have remains from the previous games, with Paul Phoenix et al all returning to the battle arena.

However, time has taken its toll and so the characters now look older, with the once sprightly Paul Phoenix now sporting a beard and wrinkles. King, having cleaned up his act and broken his drinking habit, now appears slightly younger and fresh faced (for someone

TEKKEN 3 EMERGES INTO THE ARCADES • STREET FIGHTER 3 REVEALED • PHILIPS AND OCEAN DO THE UEFA DOUBLE • CITY OF LOST CHILDREN NEARS COMPLETION •

Tekken 3



Out Now
On the shelves this month...

HARDCORE 4 X 4

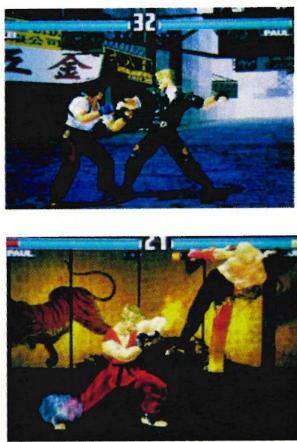
Off road racing has always appealed to the masses and Gremlin's *Hardcore 4 x 4* covers most aspects of the sport. Awarded 83% in issue 15 due to the lack of tracks.



ISS DELUXE

This Super NES classic football sim returns to debut on the PlayStation. It sadly looks quite dated and only scored 66% in issue 16 after its lack of long-term challenge.





who wears a lion mask, anyway), while Law and Nina are two who still remain as clean-cut and cool as ever.

It's the new characters which provide the main interest though, of which shots on four has been released. First off there's Fang, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Geri from The Spice Girls. Shao is a pig-tailed Japanese girl who, quite frankly, looks too young to watch a U-rated film let alone fight, while Jin, a muscular fighter with Noel Gallagher-like eyebrows, looks similar to Heihachi. Lastly there's Soul, a cool-looking guy with dreadlocks and countless body piercings.

As well as new characters *Tekken 3* boasts revamped graphics, with Namco drafting in various experts during motion-capturing to ensure the moves are both smooth and realistic.

Unfortunately it's not scheduled to hit the PlayStation until probably next year, and because the arcade game wasn't developed on the System 11 board, the conversion isn't going to be an easy process. However, work has apparently already begun, so expect more news on this sure-fire smash as soon as we get it.

Street Fighter 3



AFTER YEARS of rumours, Capcom have finally unveiled the third in their legendary *Street Fighter* series. *Street Fighter III: New Generation* was exclusively previewed to *PlayStation Plus* on a recent visit to their Osaka R'n'D offices, where a very early version of the coin-op PCB was on display. With *Street Fighter EX* taking the World Warriors into the realm of polygonised 3D, Capcom have played it safe as they stick with the familiar 2D play area associated with the series. The coin-op uses Capcom's CP-System III board, and while initially the game doesn't look that different from its many predecessors, careful inspection reveals a number of improvements. As told

to us by Capcom, only Ken, Ryu and Sagat have survived into the New Generation, as it 'wouldn't be *Street Fighter* otherwise' but they are now joined by the likes of Yun, a street-wise fighter, Dudley a British Heavyweight boxer (and very reminiscent of Dee-Jay in *Super Street Fighter*), while Necro is an undead warrior, and Ibuki is the obligatory schoolgirl entrant. In all, ten characters are promised, but each is considerably more graphically detailed than what they were before.

Capcom's graphic artists have really gone to town on the third game, and the benefits of the powerful CP-System board are obvious. The graphics resemble a Manga cartoon, and the level of detail means you can even see the power surge as Ryu pulls off a fireball. Other major additions

include a larger play area which scrolls more to the left and right, and the screen now zooms in on key aspects of the bout. In terms of control, *Street Fighter III: New Generation* retains the traditional six-button approach, but more work has gone into the 'Combo' opportunities with Capcom trying to make them integrate more fluidly with the standard moves. Similarly, the combatants can now launch themselves into the air and take the fight to (literally) new heights.

Set for release into the UK's arcades in March, Capcom are unsure as to whether the code will ever be ported to the PlayStation. Early indications are that the CP-System III board may be too advanced to copy on a relatively humble PlayStation, but the development team are hoping to have a crack at a conversion of some sorts, even if it is scaled down slightly. No doubt Virgin will be waiting in the wings with their pens and cheque book ready.

STREET FIGHTER 3'S SPRITES ARE FAR BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE PLAYSTATION ACCORDING TO CAPCOM, BUT A CONVERSION OF SORTS IS STILL POSSIBLE.

CONTRA - LEGACY OF WAR

The Contra series has been around for quite a while and *Legacy of War* makes the largest change the series has seen so far. Awarded 83% in issue 16



DESTRUCTION DERBY 2

A huge improvement over the extremely limited original, but still lacking the long-term challenge the series desperately needs. Awarded 89% in issue 15.



RELOADED

Rectifying a few of *Loaded*'s problems, *Reloaded* looks better but gameplay is slow and frustration lurks around every corner. Awarded 73% in this issue



TEMPEST X3

The original *Tempest* was an innovative blaster. Hugely revamped, *Tempest X3* is a strangely hypnotic shoot 'em up with gorgeous looks. Awarded 80% in issue 16



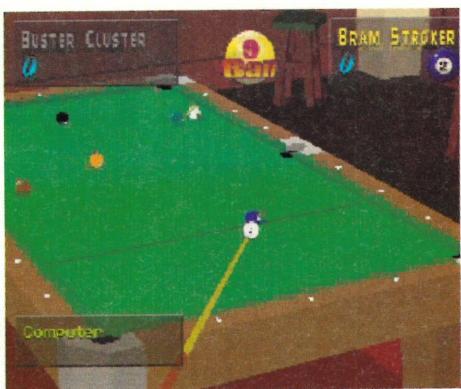
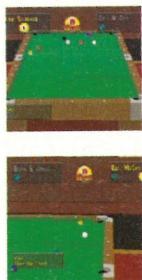
Virtual Pool

INTERPLAY's fervent

PlayStation support is set to continue as they try their hand at a Pool simulation for the machine. *Virtual Pool* is a conversion of an existing PC product, and offers a number of US play varieties, from ten ball through to a selection of more familiar UK rules. The Virtual part of the title relates to the 3D nature of



the product, with the table and balls polygon-based, and a camera

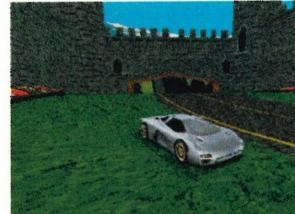
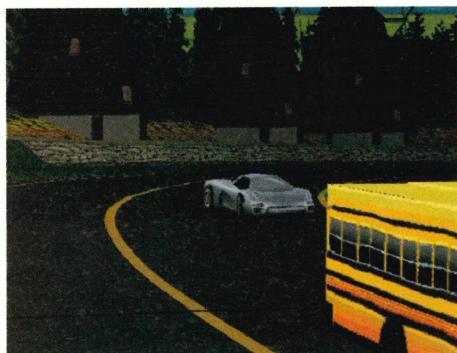


mode which allows the user to pan around the table and view it from any angle. The ball movement routines are particularly clever, emulating the real thing extremely well,

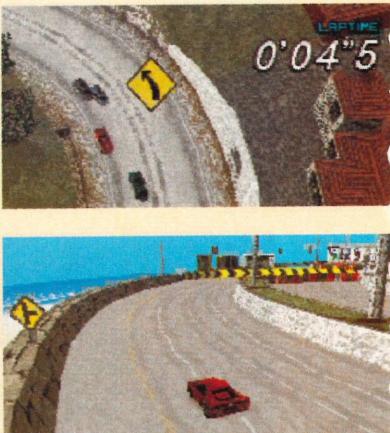
and the package is rounded off nicely with the addition of a number of bizarre jukebox tracks in the background. A full review will follow in the next issue.

Need for Speed 2

THE FIRST DETAILS regarding EA's forthcoming Need For Speed II have been released by the game's Canadian developers. An all-new line up of cars includes a McLaren F1, a Lotus Esprit V-8 and a Lamborghini Cala amongst the seven on offer, while the new tracks are



themed and take the player to Greece, Nepal, Australia, Europe, Mexico, Vancouver and Norway, which in turn feature different environments and hazards. EA Canada also promise more driving freedom and less linear courses, while there are now eleven CPU-controlled opponents, and new graphical effects include 50% more polygons than before and lighting techniques.



Speedster

PSYGNOSIS ARE preparing to take on the mighty *Micro Machines v3* as they rev up Speedster. Developed by the Lemmings 3D team, *Speedster* is a top-down racer offering a number of cars and courses featuring a host of familiar hazards. Icy courses, winding city streets and rocky outcrops all play host to the one or two-player action (the latter via a split-screen) with the aim to be one of the first three past the post. The courses are in full 3D and undulate over bridges and into dips as the cars career towards the finishing line. Similarly, if the terrain proves too arduous for a lighter vehicle, the player can take one of a number of trucks for a spin instead. *Speedster* has already proved playable enough for Namco to show interest in a Japanese release, and will hit PAL PlayStations in April.

MISSING: PRESUMED LOST

Or not as the case may be. Just **what has happened to those games** we previewed all that time ago...

SPLIT REALITIES

First Sighting: Issue 2 (October 1995)

JVC announced a spate of titles shortly after the PlayStation's release, including this strange platformer. A typical battle against evil, the action resembled the old Amiga classic *Flashback*, and featured a gun-toting hero whose athleticism rivalled that of Linford Christie. After previewing a very early version of the code, little else was heard and our most recent enquiry seems to indicate that the game has now been canned. All the more bizarre, however, was a phone call we received from an irate mother demanding we send her son a game for the pictures we printed in the mag. Odd, seeing as those scans were provided on a JVC press CD!

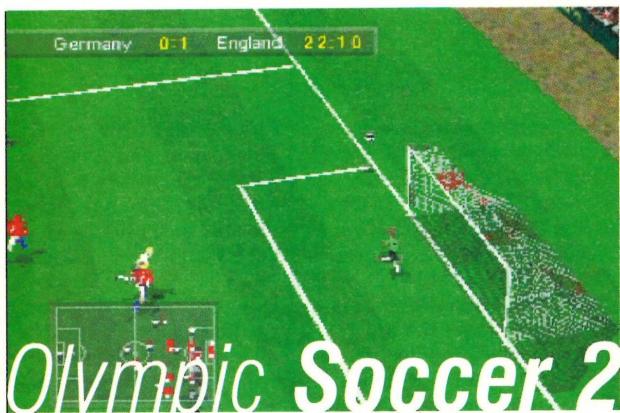


KONAMI LINKS

First Sighting: Issue 7 (April 1996)

While Konami were busy working towards International Track and Field's release, they also showed a golf game their Japanese R'n'D team were working on. Provisionally titled 'Konami Links', the game's control system was far more comprehensive than those of EA's PGA Tour series. The Dpad actually allowed the user to position where to hit the ball, and every aspect of the shot was left to player - thus meaning genuine skill was needed for a successful shot rather than well-timed button pressing. Konami are tight-lipped as to when the game is set to appear, and it keep appearing and disappearing from their release schedules.





Olympic Soccer 2

WITH THE ORIGINAL widely regarded as the best football for the PlayStation, it comes as no surprise that US Gold are working on an updated sequel. The as-yet to be titled game is being developed by the original team at Silicon Dreams, and the main aims are to eradicate the bugs of the first game (the easy goals, goalie intelligence, etc), and tighten up a number of aspects to make for a more flowing game. Alan Green may also return for a handful of fresh samples, while the number of teams and formation options are also up for review. As huge fans of the original, we have high hopes for the sequel, and the first pictures should appear very soon.



UEFA Soccer

OCEAN FIFA RIVAL, *UEFA Soccer*, is roughly 50% complete, with the first pictures filtering from the Manchester soft co. Developed by Ocean France, *UEFA Soccer* is claimed to be 'the closest the PlayStation could get to Sega's *Virtua Soccer* coin-op' with large sprites and fast speed supposedly the order of the day. Ocean France have been working on the game for nearly eighteen months now,



and the first results look very promising. They are apparently particularly happy with the game's control system which is both realistic and instinctive, allowing for one-twos and crosses and passes which other games lack. The large polygon sprites are also smoothly animated, and according to Ocean are capable of virtually any move possible in the real thing. The UEFA license also allows

Ocean to use real teams and player names, and the path to glory and the UEFA Cup begins in August when the game is provisionally pencilled in for release.

Test Drive: Off Road

THE PLAYSTATION goes monster truck crazy when Eidos joins the battle for dirt track supremacy with *Test Drive: Off Road*. Part of the aging *Test Drive* series which debuted on the Commodore 64, *Test Drive: Off Road* takes the action into the wilderness, racing across 12 dirt,



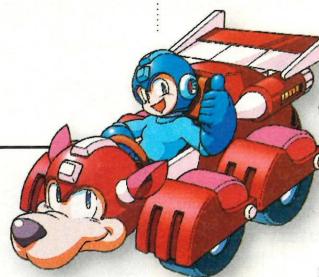
rock, sand and snow course. There's a choice of four vehicles to drive, including the Hummer, the Land Rover Defender, the Chevrolet K-1500 and the Jeep Wrangler, all of which handle realistically thanks to the game's authentic driving physics. *Test Drive: Off Road* also features a multi-player option using either split-screen or the link cable, and with both single races or full season championships to enter, there's plenty of dirt churning to sink your teeth into. *Test Drive: Off Road* is released in March.



Mega Man Chase

MENTIONED BRIEFLY in last month's issue, the first shots of Capcom's *Mega Man Chase* have emerged. Effectively *Mario Kart* but with MegaMan, Doctor Wily, and countless other characters from the seemingly endless series handling the driving duties, the game uses the familiar first-person view as the

karts spin around the track. Although the number of tracks in the final code have yet to be determined, those on display are themed around past *Mega Man* escapades, with woodlands and metallic cities, giving way to skybases on the horizon. It hasn't been decided whether Capcom's long-term UK distributors, Virgin, are to release the game over here but it does seem quite likely.



Suikoden

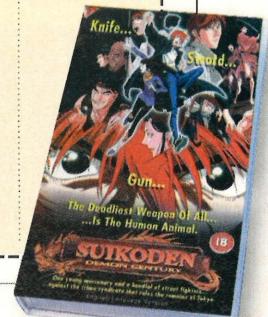
You've read the game review, now watch the video. Animation with attitude, in collaboration with Konami, has three *Suikoden* sets to give away. Each set includes a copy of the fantastic PlayStation RPG (Reviewed in Issue 16, rated 81%) and a brilliant Manga video, and is therefore well worth winning.

So, to lay your hand on one of these pack, just takes a look at the following question and send your answers to the usual *PlayStation Plus* London editorial address.

Q. Which country is famous for producing Manga videos?

All entrants must be over the age of 18. Entries must be received by 21st February.

competition



UEFA Championship League



FOLLOWING ON from last's month glimpse at Philips' forthcoming entry into the PlayStation football league, we can at last reveal screenshots of *UEFA Champions League 1996/97*.

Unsurprisingly the game fea-

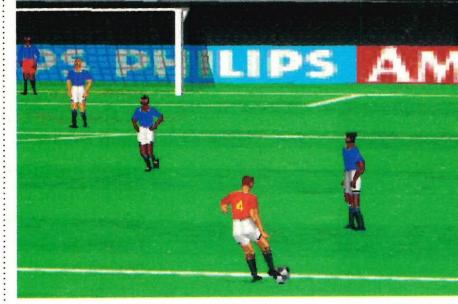
tures 3D polygon graphics, with motion-capture ensuring the player animation is as smooth and realistic as possible. Developed by Krisalis, *UEFA Champions League 1996/97* includes 16 European teams, along with

all the correct team line-ups and player rosters, as well as 32 national teams, competing in both the European Cup or just a friendly match. Four players can compete simultaneously with the aid of a multi-tap, although Philips is keen to announce the brilliant artificial intelligence system, named TactiGrid III. The systems means computer teams think for themselves at last, as the players are proactive rather than reactive to the flow of the game, thus giving a more challenging one-player game. Keep your eye on *UEFA Champions League 1996/97*, when it takes to the field in May.

Crypt Killer

BE VERY AFRAID, because Konami's gruesome gun game *Crypt Killer* is finally coming to PlayStation. Originally a smash arcade hit in which up to three players fought off Satan's minions with brightly-coloured shotguns, the Sony version promises to have all the blood and guts of the original but without the tacky toy guns.

Venturing into a six level crypt full to the brim with mummies, zombies, ghouls and spooks, either one or two gunslingers must fight through the sea of gore to emerge from the underground hell-hole alive. With alternate routes to choose from and the option to play with Konami's Hyperblaster lightgun, *Crypt Killers* may look disgusting but it sure is a hell of a lot of fun! Look out for it in March.



THE PLAYER SPRITES ARE FULLY RENDERED, AND WE ARE ALSO PROMISED TOTALLY REALISTIC MOVEMENTS THROUGH MOTION-CAPTURING.

Wild Arms

JUST ARRIVED ON our shores from Sony in Japan we have *Wild Arms*. A cutesy RPG set in the same vein of the classic *Zelda*, with the option to use a PlayStation mouse, expect a game based on interaction with thousands of other characters set across many levels.

From what we can gather at this stage, three Manga style heroes are available for your control and the adventure begins in a farming town with very laid back and calming Western style music. Half a dozen houses, with split level floors, can be entered to start with and certain tasks need to be completed before you can leave the sleepy community. Unfortunately there's loads of Japanese text to get through, so we can't give you much more information than that right now.



MORE THAN A LITTLE SIMILAR TO KONAMI'S SUKODEN, A NUMBER OF UK SOFTWARE HOUSES ARE SAID TO BE CONSIDERING WILD ARMS FOR A PAL RELEASE.



TESTED

8MB MEMORY CARD

Released by Blaze, the 8MB Memory Card is priced £39.99. They can be reached on 013020 750285.

Like the Datel alternative, the Blaze card is slightly bulkier than the normal Sony cards, and along the front end of the unit are three LEDs and a small black button. Combinations of the LEDs are used to indicate which cache is currently being used. 120 slots are available eight caches of 15, and simply pressing the black button, say, three times will take you to the third cache, and so on.

IN USE

The Datel card had a tendency to crash the machine when switching between caches, but no such problems plague the Blaze card. Switching between the eight sectors is as simple as could be, and while the data compression techniques mean that the switch can take a few more seconds than normal, the system works as well as with a normal Sony card. Users should be warned, though that removing the card while it is contemplating its next task can damage the data on the card and even lose it, so do so at your peril. Overall, Blaze have created a worthwhile alternative to the Sony card, and while forty quid isn't cheap, it's considerably less than eight normal cards.

★★★★



XIST



LOVE MISSILES

Missile overload.
Savage energy.
Atom splitting.
x2



orbitals plasma van-de-graf reverse twist devastate ripple pulse nemesis
cloud stealth 50hz trigger speech seamless multiples 256 line solid
model true colour transparent rotational scale glare smooth

Dawn of Darkness



OCEAN HAS JUST announced that their 3D shoot 'em up *Dawn of Darkness*, which was scheduled for a release in April, has now been completely scrapped. This *Doom* clone based around blasting a horde of zombies was to have been set in claustrophobic streets within heart of London, but production difficulties have led to the binning of the entire project.

City of the Lost Children

FRENCH FILM adaptation *City of the Lost Children* has finally secured a release date with Psygnosis, pencilled in for the first quarter of 1997. From the same team who made the classic art house flick *Delicatessen*, the film has been out for some time now and *PlayStation Plus* reported details of the game over a year ago in issue three.

Controlling the 10 year old orphan Miette, the player is thrust into a bizarre world that's part *Oliver Twist* and part *Jules Verne*. Around 100 pre-rendered backgrounds have been created and 20 motion-captured characters are modelled in 3D and ani-



mated in real time.

Supported by the movie's Artistic Director, Marc Caro, voices of the cast have been digitised and music is provided by Angelo Badalamenti, famous for composing the music to *Twin Peaks*. With riddles and puzzles aplenty, a twisting plot with no dead ends and unbelievably lavish graphics, *City of the Lost Children* could prove the definitive adventure.

RECOMMENDED



Die Hard Trilogy

Fox and Probe should be proud of themselves for *Die Hard Trilogy*. Three, incredibly playable and diverse titles for the price of one, and a package which makes the majority of 'Retro' packages completely redundant.



Command & Conquer

Virgin offer something a little different, as their PC smash arrives for the PlayStation. Although slightly sluggish to play, *Command & Conquer* offers unrivalled depth.



Tomb Raider

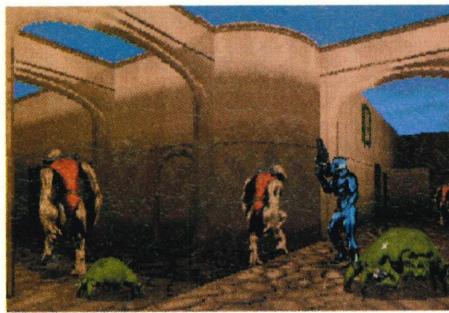
Core's finest hour, and the perfect example of just how good an arcade/adventure can be. Needless to say, Lara is set for a return to our screens this year.



Perfect Assassin

ARTWORK AND IDEAS from one of the country's most influential fantasy artists, Kev Walker, are being translated into a new science fiction adventure game to be released by Grolier Interactive called *Perfect Assassin*. First contact will come via the PC, with a PlayStation conversion due to be launched sometime in the next six months.

Action is set across several complex alien planets which are viewed from multiple camera angles. Non-linear and detailed storyline, silky smooth photo-realistic characters and perspectives in real time are all promised by the developers of the game, Synthetic Dimensions.



Pandemonium

We class *Pandemonium* as the premier platform game available on the PlayStation. It's smooth, playable, and beats *Crash Bandicoot* as far as we're concerned. BMG's first hit, but what a game.

Competition

Chronicles of the Sword



TO CELEBRATE THE RELEASE of *Chronicles of the Sword* on PlayStation, Psygnosis are giving away one custom made, real-life sword. Apparently some four feet in length and made from solid steel, the sword makes a perfect paper knife, and also doubles as a rather attractive wall-hanging ornament.

To win this marvellous example of mediaeval weaponry then simply answer the following question:

Q. Who played the title role in the classic movie Highlander?

Send yours answers on a postcard, along with your name and address, to the usual address. Entries must be received by 21st February 1997.

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- Official PlayStation Magazine



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- Play+.

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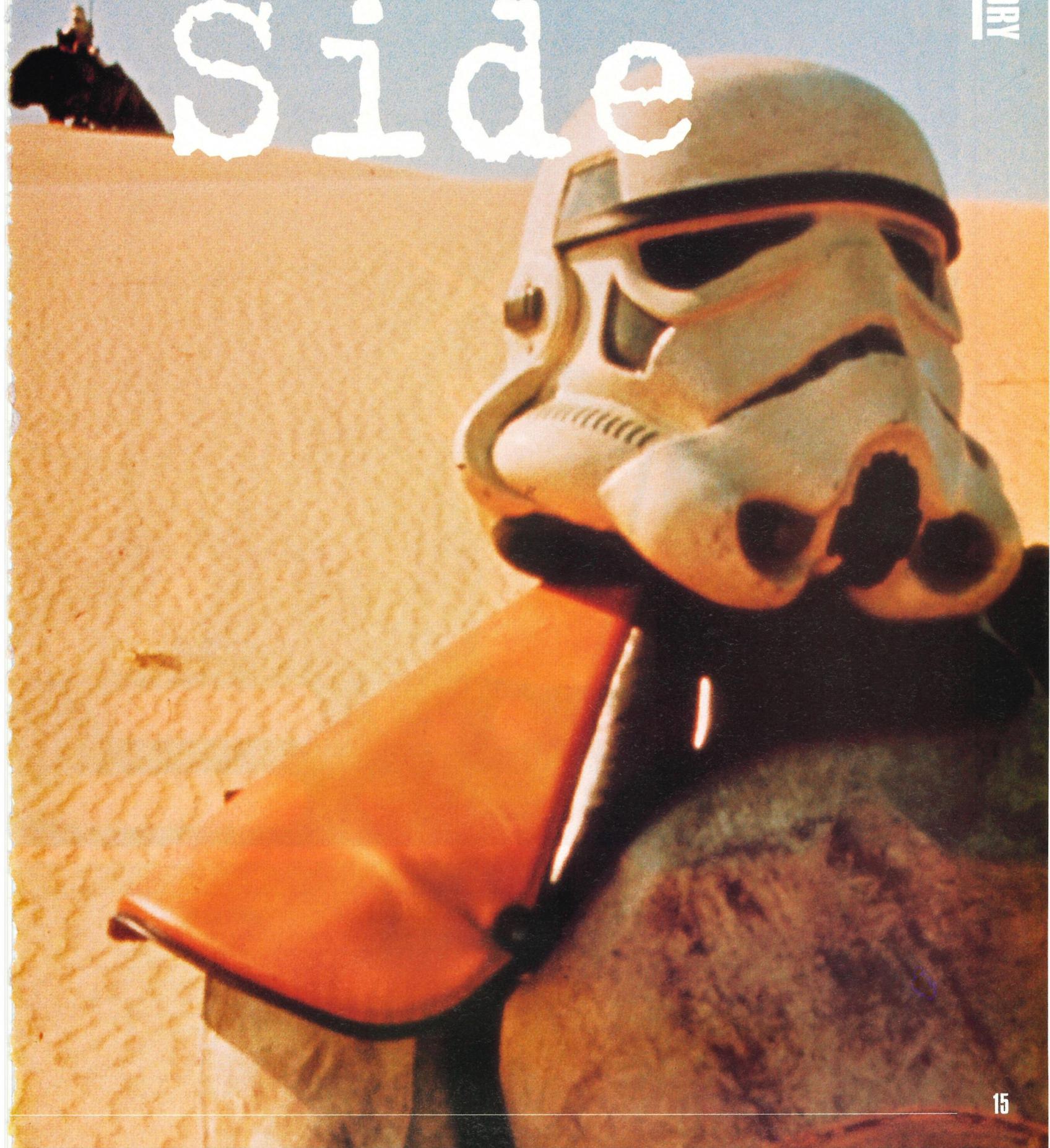


Take a Walk on the Dark

To celebrate the twentieth birthday of arguably the most acclaimed movie trilogy of all time, **Star Wars** and its two sequels will once again return to the cinema screen complete with **never-before-seen footage** and revamped special effects. To complement George Lucas' remastered vision of a galaxy far, far away, Darth Vader invades the **PlayStation in Dark Forces**, armed with the Empire's newest weapon with which to defeat the Rebel Alliance, the **Dark Trooper**

Release : March
Company : VIRGIN
Price : TBA
Players : 1
Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP

lk
Side





MANY OF KATARN'S FOES WILL BE FAMILIAR TO THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN THE STAR WARS TRILOGY. LIKE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE GAME IS SET, THE MAJORITY OF THE ENEMIES FEATURE IN THE MOVIES, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE ONE OR TWO SURPRISES IN STORE FOR THE REBEL MERCENARY.

VADER'S RAIDERS

STORMTROOPER

The pawn in the Imperial army, stormtroopers aren't particularly intelligent but they attack in numbers, overpowering the enemy rather than outwitting them. Armed with the standard issue laser rifle, they're fanatically loyal to the Empire and therefore make deadly foes.



IMPERIAL OFFICER

The Imperial officer fires more accurately than the Stormtrooper and in fewer numbers, but is only armed with a laser pistol. Of all of Katarn's enemies the Imperial officer are the easiest to defeat, their uniforms offering no protection against a laser blast whatsoever.



IMPERIAL COMMANDO

Surprisingly tough thanks to rigorous combat training, the Imperial commando favours ranged weapons rather than close-combat fighting, and carries a high-powered laser rifle that is extremely accurate. A commando can sustain three or four direct blasts before falling to the ground.



PROBE DROID

Used by the Empire to keep track of the Rebel base, Probe droids are slow but pack a powerful punch. Side-step to avoid the blasts from its laser rifle, and aim high as they glide in to attack. Equipped with explosives which detonate as and when the unit is crippled.



STAR FACTS
A LIGHTSABRE
OPERATES BY
CHANNELLING
A STREAM OF
PURE ENERGY
THROUGH A
SERIES OF
MULTI-
FACETED JEW-
EELS WHICH
FOCUS THE
ENERGY INTO A
TIGHT, PARAL-
LEL BEAM.
ONE TO THREE
JEWELS CAN BE
USED TO CRE-
ATE THE LIGHT
BEAM, AND
THE DISTANCE
BETWEEN EACH
JEWEL DETER-
MINES THE
LENGTH,
COLOUR AND
STRENGTH OF
THE
BEAM.



in a galaxy far, far away, in the days of the Old Republic, wise leaders ruled the galaxy under a common government. Jedi Knights, strong in the ways of the Force, served as the defenders of justice and protectors of the realm. This Utopian dream, however, was soon to be shattered, crushed as an unscrupulous few slowly destroyed the Republic from within. The traitor Palpatine appointed himself as Emperor of the newly formed Empire, and called upon the aid of Darth Vader to hunt down and destroy the remaining few of the Jedi Knights.

Of course, resistance was an inevitable side-effect and a small band of rebel fighters struck back at the Empire's tightening grip over the galaxy. Although disorganized and ill-equipped to begin with, the Rebellion soon blossomed as hatred for the Empire grew, and entire planets choose to fight against the system. Even with the odds stacked heavily against them, the Rebel Alliance became a force to be reckoned with...

While the rise of the Rebel Alliance and the introduction of fictional heroes like Luke Skywalker and Han Solo is visualised in what is arguably the greatest movie trilogy of all time, the story that covers the creation of the Rebellion and the partnership between Vader and Emperor Palpatine is yet untold. We all know how Obi-Wan Kenobi deactivates the Death Star's shield generators, and of Han Solo's capture at the hands of

mercenary bounty hunter Boba Fett, but few know of Anakin Skywalker's gradual

defection to the Dark side, or indeed Ben Kenobi's Jedi training under the watchful eye of Yoda. But this will all change with the imminent release of the three Star Wars prequels set for launch at the end of the Millennium, some twenty years after the original movies enjoyed their cinematic debut.

FORCE KIN

The point of all this is that there is a complete Star Wars universe that exists outside of the movies. The Rebel attack on the Death Star and the subsequent demise of the Emperor is just the tip of the Star Wars iceberg, as the ongoing struggle between good and evil continues elsewhere in that far-away galaxy. Countless books and graphic novels trace the lives of new heroes and those from the films, while the comprehensive Star Wars role-playing game allows players to enter the make-believe realm of the Rebellion to fight against the Empire for themselves.

Then, of course, there are the

videogames. With the movie trilogy immortalised many times at both the arcades and on home machines, it is now the turn of the PlayStation to play host to Star Wars, but this time Luke Skywalker is nowhere in sight.

Receiving much critical praise when it smashed onto the PC back in 1995, *Dark Forces* is at last available on the PlayStation and is theoretically the finest videogame ever created – just imagine a game that combines the adrenaline rush action of *Doom* with the magic of the Star Wars universe. Bliss, especially as a handful of familiar faces make cameo appearances, including Darth Vader, Jabba the Hutt and the notorious Boba Fett. Would-be Rebels even get to play around with some really serious weaponry, from the standard issue stormtrooper blaster to a heavy Stouker concussion rifle favoured by the various bounty hunters throughout the galaxy.

A NEW HOPE

The plot for the game isn't taken from any of the movies or indeed any of the books, and is a complete stand alone



INTERROGATION DROID

A somewhat smaller but equally deadly cousin of the Probe droid, the Interrogation droid is more agile than its larger counterpart and is also equipped with two weapons – a stun gun which temporarily freezes the target, while the power blast is used to fatally wound its victim.

REMOTE

Used by Luke Skywalker during his Jedi training, the remote is a small orb which is kept aloft by a tiny repulsor-lift device. Extremely fast and agile, the remote's weedy laser gun isn't powerful enough to rip through body armour but it will gradually deplete Katarn's personal deflector shield.

TRANDOSHAN

Perhaps the most infamous Trandoshan is Bossk, who's services were requested by Darth Vader during *The Empire Strikes Back*. Reptilian in appearance, and a formidable opponent – the concussion rifle is easily capable of decapitating a human in a single shot.

GRAN

Initially unarmed and pretty easy meat, the three-eyed Gran later attacks with thermal detonators, which they can lob with devastating accuracy. Manage to weave through their hail of explosive and then you'll have to tackle the skilled fighters in hand-to-hand combat.



So this is Katarn, the one that had been a droid in Mon Cala.

SET TO STUN

As a trained mercenary, Kyle Katarn is skilled in the use of many weapons, from unarmed combat through to lobbing thermal detonators with alarming accuracy. Given a simple hand blaster from the Rebellion at the start of his mission, Kyle soon stumbles across some meatier weapons during his adventure. Note the energy units used by each weapon in both primary and secondary modes.



MODIFIED BRYAR PISTOL

Compared to the Imperial rifle the Bryar pistol is slow-firing. However, it more than makes up for this in terms of accuracy and a much stronger single blast, giving the weapon a greater range. It is also not as ammo hungry as the heavier laser blasters.

Primary: 1 Energy Unit per shot

Secondary: N/A



STORMTROOPER LASER RIFLE

Pick up one of these babies from the smoking corpses of a stormtrooper, then wreak havoc against the Imperial scum. Rapid-firing but less accurate than a laser pistol, the laser rifle is an essential item, although it eats up energy cells like nobody's business.

Primary: 2 Energy Units per shot

Secondary: N/A



THERMAL DETONATOR

The futuristic equivalent of a hand grenade, the thermal detonator is lobbed at enemies rather than being fired. In primary mode it explodes on impact, while a three second delay is activated in secondary mode, which is perfect for taking out enemies around corners.

Primary: 1 Detonator per shot

Secondary: N/A

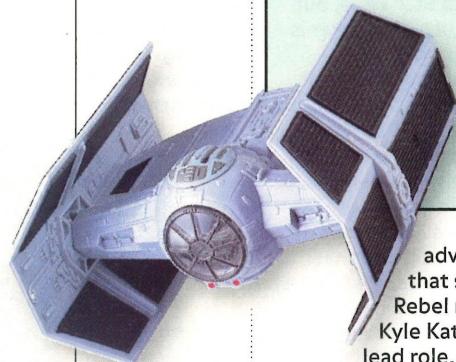


IMPERIAL REPEATER GUN

A more accurate and powerful version of the Laser rifle, the Imperial Blaster can be programmed to either fire a stream of single shots in primary mode, or a cluster of three rounds in secondary mode. One of the better weapons thanks to its rate of fire.

Primary: 1 Cell per shot

Secondary: 3 Cells per shot



adventure that stars

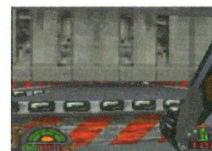
Rebel mercenary Kyle Katarn in the lead role. Just as

the Empire threatened the galaxy with the potentially devastating Death Star, the Emperor has now created an all-new weapon that is endangering the existence of the Rebellion. Armies of the lethal Dark Trooper are currently under construction, the robots built from parts manufactured in factories across the system and then assembled on a secret Imperial cruiser, where they will then be housed in jet pods that are scattered across the galaxy, in search of the hidden Rebel base. As

Kyle, the objective is to hunt down the Imperial bases that are developing the Dark Trooper, steal the

blue prints and then destroy the Imperial flagship to prevent the enemy attack from even beginning.

In practice this daunting task is all the more difficult, and is stretched across 14 missions that highlight Katarn's progress towards his final goal. Through a series of animated cutscenes the story begins, with Kyle ordered to

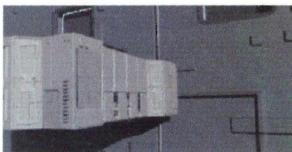


penetrate an Imperial garrison which is hiding the plans to the Death Star. Although not tying in directly with the overall aim of the game, this is one of a few cross-overs that tie the game in with the films, Kyle providing the information that the Rebels need to plan an attack on the Empire's space station.

In addition to the cutscenes, which provide a more general overview of Kyle's progress through the game, every objective for the forthcoming mission is detailed by the Rebel commander, Jan Ors, who also outlines the area in which the next section is set, along with any important information you may need regarding Imperial resistance.

I HAVE YOU NOW

As for the game itself, it is first-person perspective shoot 'em up like *Doom*, but one that isn't quite so simplistic. There are more puzzles to tackle, the levels aren't quite so linear and



GAMORREAN GUARD

These pig-like aliens are primitive in both appearance and their combat style, choosing traditional melee weapons over hand blasters. Therefore these beasts are lethal in close combat but are prone to long-range attack. Stay back and fire like crazy then.



DIANOOGA

These foul creatures hunt their victims by swimming under the cover of the murky waters, and then pop up to strike. Wade quickly through the sludge to avoid a surprise attack, opening fire to destroy the beast before it can submerge once more.



KELL DRAGON

These enormous beasts stand over six feet tall, and are also most twice as wide! Protected by thick armoured-plated skin, the Kell Dragon is apparently liked by Jabba the Hutt, who keeps them as pets in the lower decks of his star cruiser.



BOBA FETT

The most formidable opponent save Darth Vader himself, Boba Fett is the bounty hunter responsible for the capture Han Solo, and is therefore one of the most feared mercenaries in the galaxy, be afraid... in fact be very afraid.



STAR FACTS
THE TIE FIGHTER IS GIVEN ITS NAME BECAUSE IT IS PROPELLED BY TWIN ION ENGINES.



JERON FUSION CUTTER

Designed as a construction tool rather than a weapon, the Fusion Cutter fires off bursts of plasma which can sear through pretty much any type of armour. In primary mode the cutter fires one barrel at a time, while the secondary mode spits a burst from all four of the barrels.

Primary: 1 Cell per shot

Secondary: 8 Cells per shot



IM MINES

Depending on the operating mode, the mines will either explode after three seconds or, if they've rigged up to a motion sensor detonator, when something moves into its activation radius. Obviously, it's not particularly wise to hang around once one of these babies has been activated.

Primary: 1 Mine per shot

Secondary: N/A



PACKED MORTAR GUN

Similar to a hand-held rocket launcher, the chunky mortar gun lobbs a shell of high explosives which explode on impact. Most effective when firing at targets over long distances, otherwise the firer can be caught in the blast when firing upon nearby enemies.

Primary: 1 Shell per shot

Secondary: N/A



STOUKER CONCUSSION RIFLE

The weapon favoured by bounty hunters across the galaxy, this high-powered rifle fires compressed bullets of ionised air which explode in shockwaves, making this the ideal weapon for engaging multiple targets at a time. Effective only at short ranges.

Primary: 4 Cells per shot

Secondary: N/A



ASSAULT CANNON

If you thought the BFG was big then get a load of this beast. Taking up almost the whole of the right-hand side of the screen, the assault cannon can fire both plasma blasts and rockets, so save this baby for the bounty hunter Boba Fett and those damned Dark Troopers.

Primary: 1 Cell per shot

Secondary: 1 Shell per shot



there's also a lot more freedom to explore every corner of the game.

Technically *Dark Forces* is superior to *Doom*, but still is visually dated compared to some of the more recent 3D blasters. In terms of structure the levels in *Dark Forces* are proper 3D as opposed to pseudo-3D environments like those in *Doom*, and therefore many of the locations are multi-levelled, with walkways crossing high above the ground and tunnels that cut underneath other sections of the stage. As Kyle can crouch and jump there's a lot more scope for intricate level design, with hidden rooms that can only be accessed by



ducking under ledges or by climbing up to higher sections of the stage.

The creation of a more believable environment is also aided by Kyle's ability to look up and down. Although players don't have the complete freedom to look straight up or right over a ledge, altering the angle of attack makes it far easier when engaging enemies firing from above or below, as well as giving players the opportunity to look before they leap, a particularly bad habit which often ends in the



STAR FACTS
HAN SOLO AND CHEWBACCA HAVE BEEN BATTLE BUDS SINCE SOLO RESCUED THE WOOKIEE FROM SLAVERY. EVER SINCE CHEWBACCA HAS REMAINED BY THE SMUGGLER'S SIDE, INSISTING ON PROTECTING SOLO UNTIL HE HAS REPAYED THE DEBT IN FULL.

DARK TROOPER PROTOTYPE

The destruction of the Dark Trooper is the ultimate objective of Kyle Katarn, so it's inevitable that he'll encounter these robotic monsters at some point. Not quite finished as yet, and so lacks armour plating and the jet pack.



DARK TROOPER

Alas, by the time Katarn reaches the Dark Trooper factory, these mechanical nightmares are fully operational. Equipped with a high calibre weapon, thick armoured plating and a jet pack which allows it to effortlessly skim through the air.



"COOL BOARDERS IS SUPERB".

Mean Machines PlayStation

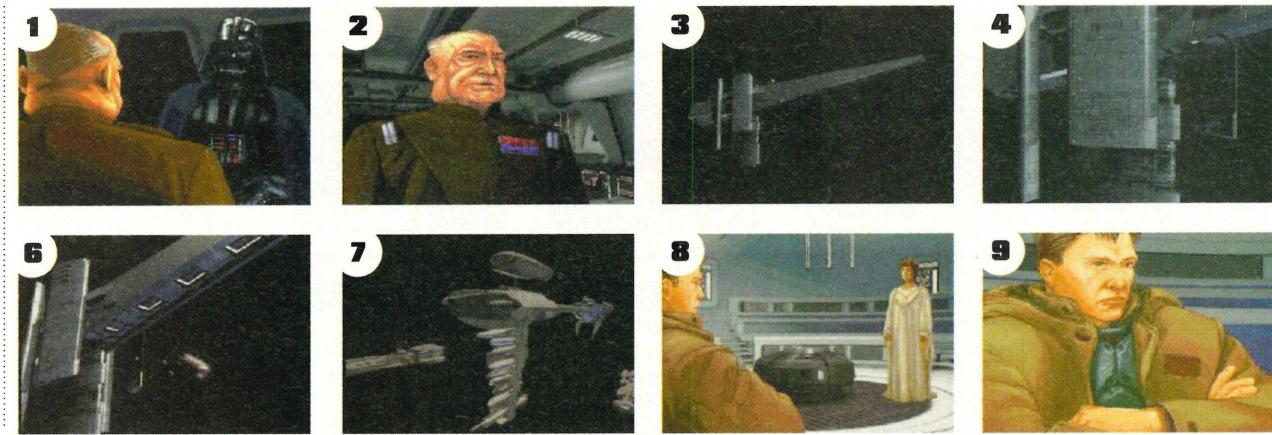


"Cool Boarders is the top one-player sports game on the PlayStation"

PlayStation Plus 91%



DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF PLAYSTATION



A LONG TIME AGO...

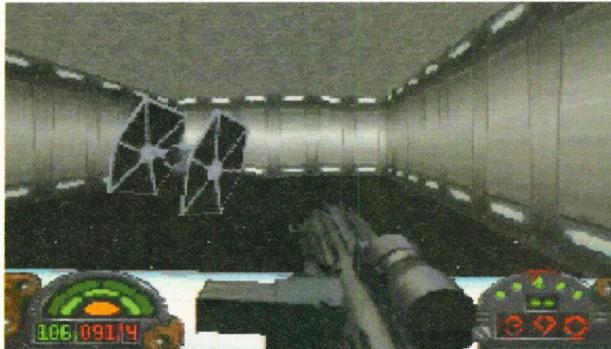


It's been almost twenty years since the Star Wars phenomena spread across the globe, when George Lucas's vision was finally realised when Star Wars had its cinematic debut back in the summer of

1977. It was a movie quite unlike anything else, and even though it was obvious that Star Wars was more than a little special, I doubt even George Lucas could have predicted the impact the film has made on the public, and that two decades later interest in the Star Wars trilogy is greater than ever. Although this is largely due to the release of the Special Edition movies in spring 1997, there has nevertheless been a steady stream of merchandising which has ensured constant interest ever since legend began.

Along with the countless books, graphic novels, comics and compendiums available, model kits and plastic figurines have proved the most collectible of all the Star Wars gear available. Ever since Kenner released the new range of action figures back in 1995 demand for the original models has risen, to the point where a single Princess Leia figure, complete with blaster and still in its original packaging, was sold for almost two hundred pounds!

Even the recent Leia figure has risen in value, as Carrie Fisher was rumoured to have been happy with the model and its apparent likeness of herself; wouldn't you be narked if you were immortalised in plastic with a pea-sized head stuck awkwardly on a muscle-bound body? This beefed-up image was consistent throughout the range, with the stormtroopers looking chunkier than ever, and even Obi-Wan Kenobi's once-frail body now boasting toned pecs and a six pack stomach. As for Luke Skywalker, since when did he have biceps to rival those of Desperate Dan?



bloody demise of Katarn.

In fact most of the levels in *Dark Forces* are deeper than those in *Doom*, as well as being significantly bigger. This sense of depth is most noticeable on the stages that are set outside, with huge chasms to leap across and sheer drops plaguing the scenery. Peering down to check for ledges is essential, ensuring there's a rocky platform to break your fall rather than simply plummeting to your doom.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

However, while the levels are indeed larger and have a greater feeling of depth, visually they are far from perfect. Just like *Doom*, pixelation becomes a problem up close, so unless you steer clear of the walls it's difficult not to notice the chunky graphics, which plague both the background textures and the

character sprites. Scrolling isn't particularly slick either, slowing to a disappointing judder when larger objects are moving around on-screen. Again, this mainly affects the larger exterior levels, in which a load of enemies can be seen at any one time, so the problem is hardly noticeable in tight, enclosed locations. Secondly, in the thick of the action you don't really notice the jerky scrolling that much – sure, it looks pretty horrible when you're exploring the scenery, but when there's half a dozen stormtroopers taking pot-shots, dodgy scrolling is the last thing on your mind.

But for all these negative criticisms regarding *Dark Forces*' presentation, it's by no means all bad. For one thing, the essence of Star Wars has been captured perfectly, from the stark futuristic look of the Imperial starships to the grotty depths of the city sewers. The films



have obviously influenced the style of the levels with many familiar locations cropping up, including the vast towers that Obi-Wan Kenobi climbed around to deactivate the shield generator, and the long white corridors from the opening Imperial attack scene in Star Wars.

Most of the characters are instantly recognisable too, from the white-suited stormtroopers who attack en masse, to the weedy Imperial officers who cower behind cover and shout for your surrender. But Imperial enemies aren't the only form of resistance Kyle will encounter, and countless aliens pop up for taste of Rebel blood; Dianoga, the worm-like sewer creature from Star Wars, swims through the trash compactors in the Imperial city, Gamorrean guards have been drafted in by Jabba the Hutt to protect his ship (which doubles as one of the game's later levels), the three-eyed Ree-Yees





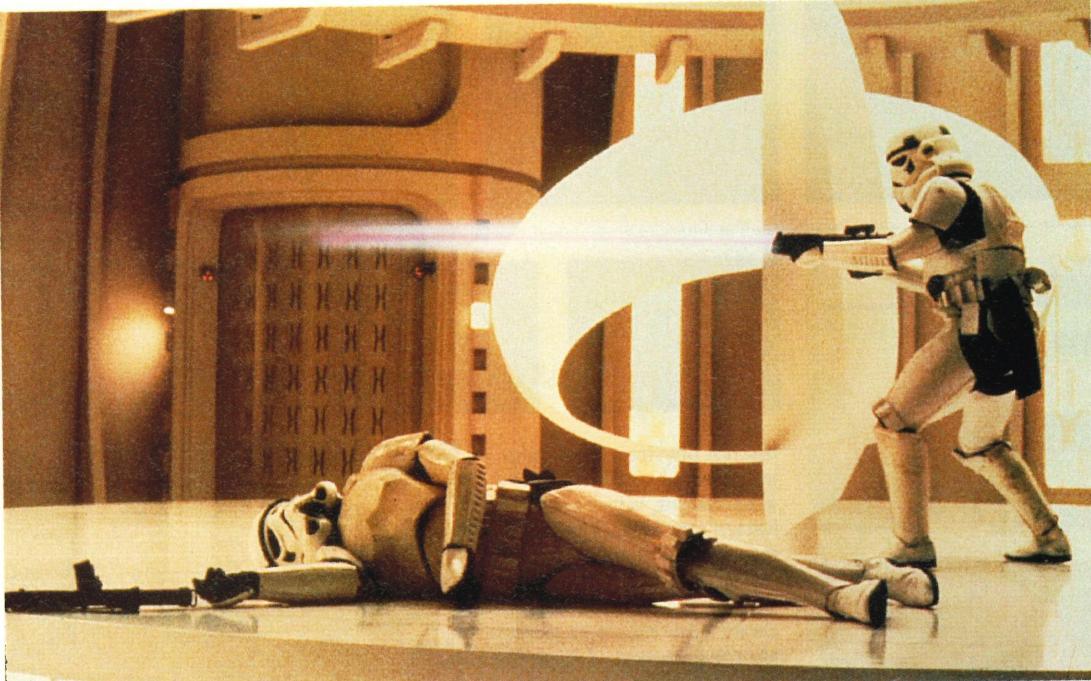
tosses thermal detonators, while the Trandoshan, a reptilian race identical to the bounty hunter Bossk from *The Empire Strikes Back*, hunts down Katarn with a concussion rifle.

REBEL COUNTER-ATTACK

Kyle is more than adequately equipped to tackle his enemy though, and has a wide variety of weapons and equipment with which to aid his task. The half-a-dozen or so laser rifles increase in size and power, and are either single shot weapons or rapid firing. Thermal Detonators aren't quite so easy to get to grips with as they must be lobbed at the enemy, holding down the fire button to determine the distance of the throw. Mines are a little easier to control, laying them on the ground and then waiting for the time delay to expire before they explode.

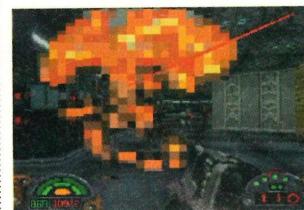
Many of the weapons have secondary modes of fire too. Thermal detonators, for example, can be programmed to explode after three seconds rather than on impact, and therefore prove extremely effective when thrown around corners or up onto high ledges. Mines can be adjusted to detonate using a motion sensor, while a few of the guns are be changed to fire multiple shots – the fusion cutter fires a spray of four plasma blasts, while the Imperial Repeater fires a small cluster of three different shots.

While firing a hails of bullets has its obvious bonuses, there's also the conservation of ammunition to consider.



The Empire isn't too keen on Rebel spies sneaking through their ranks and so power cells are in short supply. Storage cupboards can be opened and the contents stolen, but the burning remains of an enemy provide a healthier supply of ammo, so start picking up any spare cartridges before the body has even had time to cool!

There is a load of other collectibles to discover, the most common of which is a energy pack for Kyle personal shield generator. The shield, which protects against laser blasts



STAR FACTS
THERE ARE FIVE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF STAR DESTROYER, ALTHOUGH THE EMPIRE'S PIECE DE RESISTANCE IS THE SUPER STAR DESTROYER, THE EXECUTOR. SERVING AS DARTH VADER'S PERSONAL FLAGSHIP, THE EXECUTOR IS EIGHT KILOMETERS LONG AND HAS A CREW OF OVER 28,000 IMPERIAL TROOPS, MANNING 500 TURBO LASER BATTERIES, 250 CONCUSSION MISSILE TUBES AND 250 ION CANNONS. IT IS CAPABLE OF DEPLOYING A GROUND ATTACK FORCE CONSISTING OF 38,000 TROOPS, 25 AT-AT WALKERS AND 50 AT-STs.



"SELL YOUR GRANNY AND PLAY TOBAL NO 1 TILL YOUR FINGERS BLEED".

Play 94%

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**ToBAL
NO.1**

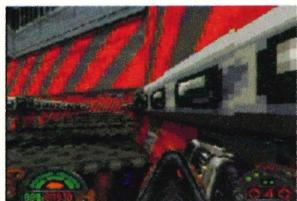
"The quest mode is a superb addition to the game, and makes for some late nights as it's really tough to complete"

Mean Machines PlayStation



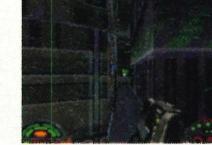
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THE POWER
OF PLAYSTATION

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DESIGN FOR LIFE

HOTH



INDUSTRIAL



MINES



MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

What all of this basically adds up to is a game that's much more involving than *Doom*, certainly, but one that is by no means the hallowed classic it so easily could have been. This is largely due to the game's lack of immediacy – the difficult joypad controls combined with the dated graphics fail to capture the attention, and it's only after a little perseverance that the compelling nature of *Dark Forces* actually shines through.

You see, even though there's the Star Wars element to connect with, *Dark Forces* isn't as obvious as *Doom*; the levels aren't quite so open and free, and the controls are nowhere near as intuitive. It takes time and practice to master the joypad set-up, and even then it's not easy to simultaneously

CITY SEWERS



IMPERIAL CRUISER



Dark Forces may only boast 14 levels but each is a sprawling monster that is full of surprises. Right from the very start, when Kyle Katarn penetrates the Imperial garrison to steal the Death Star plans, the sheer variety in both the visual appearance and the actual level design won't fail to impress. Admittedly the graphics do look a bit dated, but it's the closest thing you'll get to experiencing the struggle between the Empire and the Rebellion on the PlayStation, so enjoy!

Opinion Disappointing as it doesn't really live up to the Star Wars legend, *Dark Forces* however, is nevertheless an engrossing adventure that combines a compelling storyline with frantic and often challenging gameplay. Visually dated but capturing the Star Wars 'feel' perfectly, this is an enjoyable but by no means ground-breaking blast that could have been so much better.

AS



switch between weapons, side-step and look up during a heated fire-fight.

Dark Forces doesn't have the number of levels offered by *Doom* (although they are considerably bigger and more intricate in design), neither does it have a link-up option, but what it does have is an interesting storyline which gives the player an objective to achieve, rather than simply eliminating everything that moves. This

makes it infinitely more enjoyable for the solo gamer, who becomes entangled in the Rebellion's fight against the mighty Empire.

So, if you can struggle past the initial disappointment and make the most from the awkward control system, you'll find a rewarding often challenging arcade adventure that is full of surprise and excitement. True, it's not the landmark game it promised to be, but nevertheless it's enjoyable and is damn good step towards the future – here's looking forward to a *Dark Forces* 2.

STAR FACTS
BOBA FETT WEARS MODIFIED MANDALORE ARMOUR, WHICH IS JUST AS PROTECTIVE AS A FULL STORMTROOPER BATTLE SUIT. ADDITIONALLY THE SUIT IS EQUIPPED WITH WRIST LASERS THAT CAN SLICE THROUGH THICK METAL, ROCKET DARTS, A TURBO-PROJECTED GRAPPLING HOOK, A MINIATURE FLAME PROJECTOR AND A CUSHION GRENADE LAUNCHER.



PSP RATING...

Graphics : 80
Animation : 75
Sound FX : 86
Music : 84
Lastability : 84
Playability : 85

84



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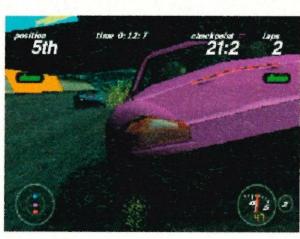


Westwood
STUDIOS

LAST ONE STANDING WINS...

Porsche Challenge

EACH OF THE SEVEN DRIVERS HAS A PORSCHE OF THEIR OWN, AND WHILE EACH BOXSTER IS IDENTICAL APART FROM COLOUR, THE DRIVER'S PERFORMANCE VERY DIFFERENTLY FROM ONE ANOTHER.



Release : MARCH

Company : SONY

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-2

Genre : RACING

the majority of people see the Porsche Boxster as a dream machine that will never be anything more than a lust object, both because of its price and also as the sheer demand for the car has created a waiting list longer than the queue for the gent's toilet at an incontinence convention. It's the first brand to new design from the Porsche stable for over twenty years, and looks set to over-take the established 911 as Porsche's flagship sports car.

It's an exciting collabora-

tion for both Sony and Porsche - the German manufacturer benefits from the additional publicity of its new roadster, while Sony and more specifically the game will enjoy the link with Porsche and its thoroughbred pedigree. After all, a game sponsored by the German giants will sure as hell be more popular than any racing game endorsed by Lada.

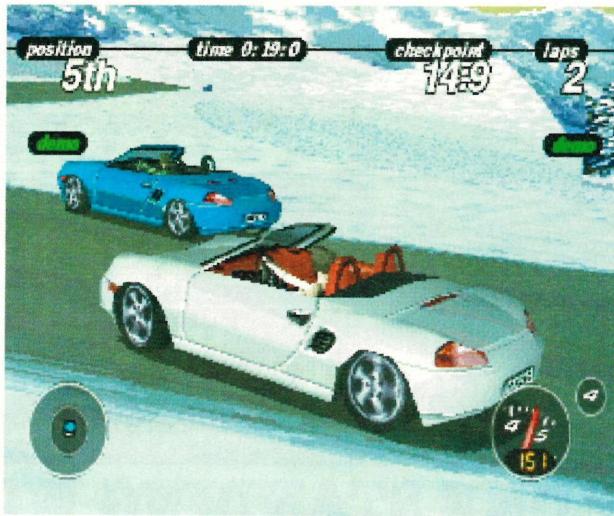
Better still, it promises to be the most accurate driving simulation on the PlayStation, boasting more realism than even *Formula 1*, yet having all the thrills and spills of *Rage Racer*. It is,

according to Sony, the closest thing to owning and driving a Porsche Boxster without forking out £35,000, although you can forget the satisfaction of cruising through the streets in front of jealous bystanders, and the game doesn't quite have the same pulling power that comes with owning one of the world's finest motor cars.

SILVER DREAM MACHINE

Porsche Challenge is being exclusively developed for the PlayStation by the same team that coded *Total NBA '96*, and is Sony's big hope for its grey box of wonders this summer. However, it faces fierce competition from the mass of racing games already cruising the PlayStation circuit, especially from Namco's forthcoming *Rage Racer*, which looks to up the stakes when it's released this spring.

Porsche Challenge should be more than well prepared for the race though, as the game pushes the technological boundaries of the PlayStation to the very limit, using sophisticated programming techniques to create the startlingly realistic presentation and gameplay - if you thought *Formula 1* was slick then buckle up, as this



FANCY A DRIVE IN ONE OF THESE BABIES? WELL YOU CAN IF YOU'VE GOT £35,000, OR ALTERNATIVELY BUY PORSCHE CHALLENGE AND WIN ONE WITH THE IN-GAME COMPETITION.



Porsche Challenge really does break all barriers in terms of visual accuracy.

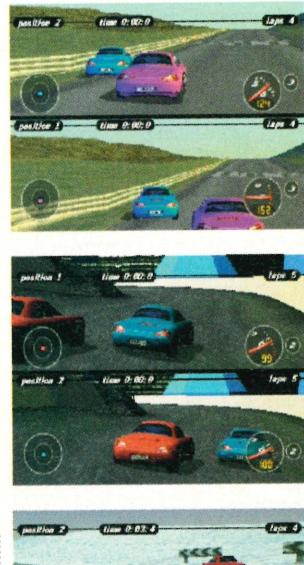
This attention to detail and aim for perfection is hardly surprising though, as Porsche overlooked the project from its conception, and provided the technical information which proved invaluable during the creation of the 3D model of the brand new Boxster. Some 300 texture-mapped polygons recreate the sleek, classic shape and style of the Boxster, which makes it considerably more detailed and indeed technically complex than the vehicles in *Ridge Racer Revolution* and pretty much every other game in the genre. Hell, it's even possible to peer inside the convertible, looking down into the cockpit which comes complete with dashboard dials and even its very own stereo!

ALTER EGOS

The car isn't the only aspect of *Porsche Challenge* which is

visually impressive either, even at this early stage. Before the player actually gets to sit at the wheel of the Boxster they must select a virtual driver, of which there are seven. Each has their own personality and driving style which affects the way the car performs, as well as looking very different from one another. Each driver is made up from an surprising 150 polygons which therefore gives them a smooth, realistic appearance, while the use of motion capture ensures they are all animated to perfection, even though all they to do is sit inside the car and tug at the steering wheel! Interestingly, the drivers are animated in real time, which essentially means that they'll move in time with the player's controls – you're binary buddy will pull the wheel to the left when taking a left-hand corner, and vice versa.

Just like pretty much every other aspect of the game, the drivers have been fully light-



SONY HAS OPTIMISED PORSCHE CHALLENGE SO IT WON'T SLOW DOWN IN TWO-PLAYER MODE.

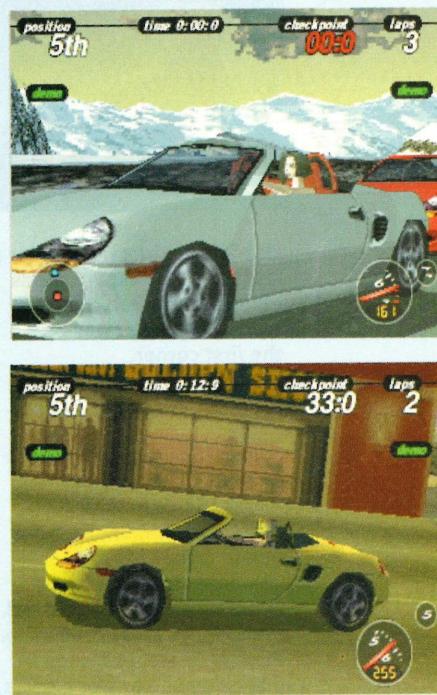
sourced, which again helps to give the impression of a more believable reality. Three real-time light-sources reflects from the Boxster's metallic paint work, while the sun constantly beams down on the circuits to cast areas of the track in shadow and others in dazzling sunlight.

The light-sourcing is just one aspect that helps to create an authentic environment, as each track is also littered with other neat graphical touches, from leaves that float in the car's slipstream, to pools of mud which splash up the side of the Boxster as it speeds past. Skid marks are

THE PORSCHE PEDIGREE CONTINUES

While Sony has made sure *Porsche Challenge* will be an exciting, realistic white-knuckle ride, it's hard not to over-look the game-play and drool over the staggering presentation. From the complex 3D model of the Boxster to the real-life dynamics of the tracks, the attention to detail in the game is quite incredible. Three real-time light-sources recreate the sun glaring down on the Boxster's sleek shape, while detailed polygon drivers yank at the steering wheel inside the detailed cockpit, complete with dashboard dials and car stereo.

The tracks are equally impressive, from the snow road sides of the Alpine tracks to the fast straights of the Stuttgart test circuit. The tarmac is plagued by pools of mud and water which spray as the Boxster speeds through them, while leaves are kicked up in the slipstream of the roadster, making this one of the most believable environments ever featured in a racing game.



THE REAL THING

At the beginning of the year, Porsche unveiled its first all-new car in some twenty years. The Boxster is the result of years of hard work by the Weissach Development Centre, who have drawn upon forty years of experience to create a car which both pushes back the boundaries of the driving experience and also remains faithful to Porsche's heritage.

Right from the start Porsche knew exactly what they wanted to create with the Boxster – a car which captured the essence of the classic Porsche 1950's Spyder while at the same time manufacturing a sleek roadster that would out-class, both in term of appearance and performance, anything else on the road.

So, with years of research and experience

under its belt, Porsche began to bring the dream to life. The Boxster is based on a mid-engine design, which basically means the weight is evenly spread

sion, which allows the Boxster to grip the road even when driving at full speed.

It's the horizontally-opposed water-cooled 6-cylinder engine, Porsche's first ever to go into production, which gives the car its impressive power though, pushing the metallic monster from 0 to 60 miles-per-hour in a staggering six seconds.

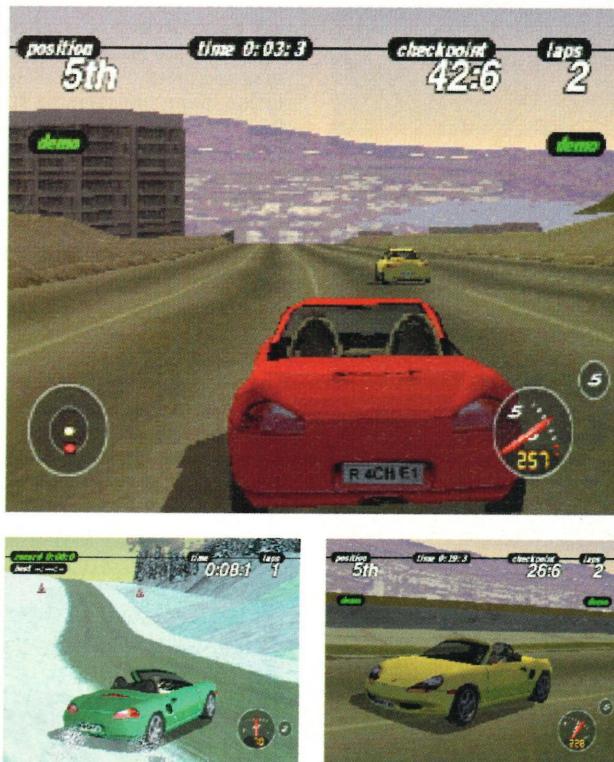
However, this level of perfection doesn't come cheap – to buy a Porsche Boxster you'll need £35,000, a mere snip compared to the price Lamborghini charge for a Diablo, but a pretty hefty wad nevertheless.

But even if you have got this sort of cash to hand, the chances of actually owning Porsche's dream machine are slim, at least for the time being – demand for the Boxster is tremendous, so if you want one of these babies then you'll just have to join at the back of the queue.



across the front and rear wheels, increasing stability and also responsiveness. Optimum handling is ensured by custom-built suspen-

THE DETAIL ON BOTH THE CARS AND THE TRACK IS PHENOMENAL, WITH LIGHT REFLECTING OFF THE BODY-WORK AND LEAVES FLOATING IN THE SLIPSTREAM.



also left on the tarmac after a fast start, kicking up clouds of dust as the Porsche roadster accelerates away into the first corner.

DOING THE BOXSTER BEAT

Porsche Challenge isn't just a demonstration of the PlayStation's graphical power though. Beneath its glossy facade is a racing game that promises to be every bit as fast, furious and fun as *Ridge Racer Revolution*. *Porsche Challenge* can be played by one or two players,

racing around twenty tracks set across four courses. Differing greatly in size, difficulty and of course appearance, the circuits range from a icy Alpine circuit to the legendary Porsche test track situated in Stuttgart, so gamers have the chance to push the Boxster to its limits on the track on which it was tested. There's also a mirror mode which effectively doubles the number of courses on offer, while a stack hidden cheat modes have been included to ensure *Porsche Challenge* is packed with surprises well

after the players has mastered each circuit.

The tracks are interactive too, and skillful drivers are rewarded as they speed around the circuit. Short-cuts and bonuses are given to players who manage to notch up record times, while other short-cuts are hidden away to help drivers who aren't quite so adept.

DIVIDE BY TWO

In addition to the one-player game there's a two-player split-screen option, allowing two armchair drivers to simultaneously sample the delights of Porsche's newest baby. Racing around any of the circuits, you can compete against a real-life opponent rather than drone cars, and because the two-player game has been optimised there's very little slow-down – just frantic, one-on-one racing.

Unless, of course, one driver is significantly better than the other, when usually the player in last place sees nothing more than the other player's rear lights. This is not so with *Porsche Challenge*, thanks to the intelligent catch-up option which evens out the odds for even the worst driver. It

works by increasing the top speed of the trailing driver and also permitting them to make more mistakes than that of the leader, thus bringing the two cars closer together for a much more exciting race. However, the speed boost won't actually push the last place driver into the lead, providing the first place driver keeps their speed up and doesn't make any major mistakes.

The Interactive musical score should also aid excitement, as it changes tempo and mood with both of the player's current race position, but also when the time left to complete the lap is running out.

WINNING FOR REAL

So Porsche Challenge should, hopefully, be just as exciting to play as it is to look at. However, whether it faithfully recreates the Boxster driving experience is a different matter entirely, although one lucky gamer has the chance to find out for themselves – there's an in-game chance of winning a brand new Porsche Boxster, so maybe the dream of owning a £35,000 Porsche isn't quite so far-fetched after all.

SLAM EVIL!

THE PHANTOM

12

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BASED ON THE LEE FALK WRITTEN BY JEFFREY BOAM PRODUCED BY ROBERT EVANS AND ALAN LADD, JR. DIRECTED BY SIMON WINCER
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Lifeforce Tenka

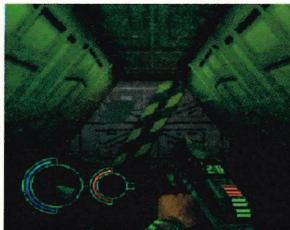
STRANDED ON AN OFF-WORLD COLONY, TENKA IS FORCED TO SINGLE HAND-EDLY TAKE ON AN EVIL CORPORATION.



Although first person perspective shoot 'em ups, or *Doom* clones, seem to provide some people with exactly what they are looking for in a game, not even the most ardent fan would disagree that many of them look and play in very similar way. Since the original was released all those years ago, half a dozen or so shameless copies have appeared using a by now standard presentation of a 3D environment. *Doom*, *Final Doom*, *Hexen*, *Dark Forces*, all much of a muchness and with

Quake and *Duke Nukem 3D* also on the way, little is likely to change for the time being. But wait, just hold those horses back because there's a new kid on the block claiming to have a radical new attitude towards this thread bare genre.

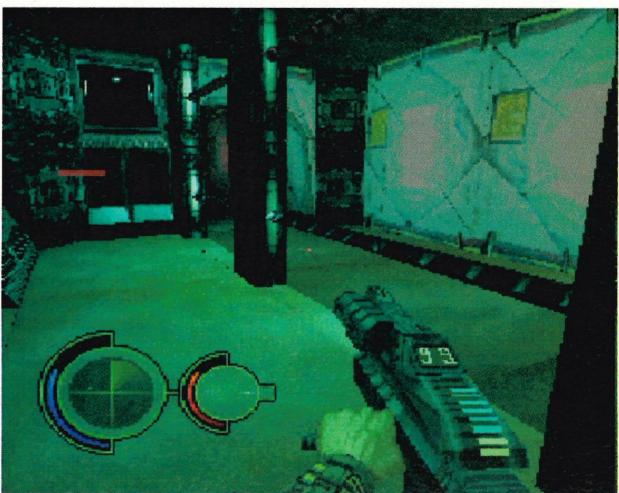
While recognising the importance of the general



category of games, Psygnosis think players like you and me are now searching for the next step forward. Certain characteristics of the current clutch have been identified by the designers as being a bit out dated, and rather than trashing everything, they've set out to provide the slickest, most challenging, best looking 3D blast ever invented. Mouth watering stuff we think.

PROPHECY OF A DARK FUTURE

Even at the most fundamental stage – the storyline – it's evident that Psygnosis have taken a very thoughtful approach to the job. By the year 2096 the Earth has been raped and is a terrible place to live. Selfishly destroyed by wars and terrible levels of pollution, the planet lies semi derelict. Only those that have no choice remain and

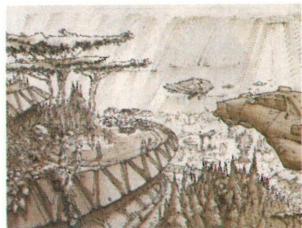


Release : FEBRUARY
Company : PSYGNOSIS
Price : £44.95
Players : 1
Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP

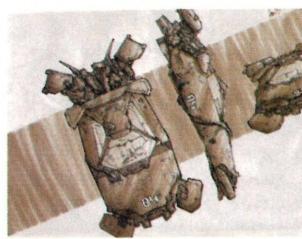
not surprisingly the one and only aim of these forgotten inhabitants is to try to raise enough cash to escape to the off world colonies which promise paradise.

Tenka, a mutilated anti-hero figure akin to characters such as the Caped Crusader

or Judge Dread, has worked himself into the ground for many years to buy his ticket to utopia. He has recently arrived on Extrevius 328, only to find himself in a living hell. This place turns out to be a massive Corporate Conglomerate manufacturing



THESE SKETCHES SHOW HOW PSYGNOSIS DESIGNED THE ELABORATE START UP SEQUENCE FOR THEIR DOOM BEATING GAME.



plant for Bionoids, which are a deadly warrior forces produced for sinister private companies. Worse still, *Tenka* discovers that inhabitants of the planet who won't be missed by anyone are being used as spare parts to create this army. Backed into this no way out situation, *Tenka* reluctantly decides to take a stand and armed only with a prototype warfare suit and a Rebel organic memory package, takes on the evil Corporation single handedly. It is your job, as the player, then to overthrow a tyrannical govern-



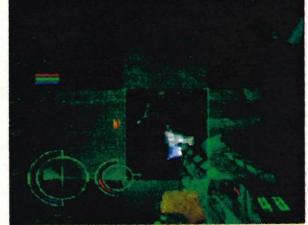
ment, free a population that has been frozen as a raw material and put an end to this unjust society. As the saying goes, no one said this was going to be easy.

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

What immediately strikes you as being different from the run of the mill sons of



Doom is the way *Tenka*'s environment is created. Where as before 90 degree walls and flat floors may have been the order of the day, this game's architecture incorporates features such as multi-level floors, walls that curve and ceilings that are domed. Emphasis has been placed on a much more realistically 3D



environment and at this stage already looks like being a big improvement. These are changes of more than just an aesthetic kind as interaction with your surroundings is apparently pushed to the max. For instance gaps between ledges need to be judged accurately and it is possible to assume the doggy

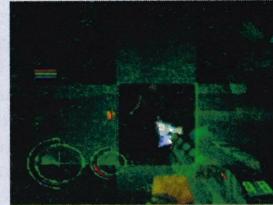
AT THE ARMOURY

While many of the traditional features of the genre have been rethought, *Tenka* is still based around the premise that there are lots of bad guys out there that need reducing to their component particles. Sticking to the frenetic blast format, a number of special weapons can be found dotted around the levels. Powering up the bog standard gun leads to it self generating or morphing into a new version right before your eyes. Pick ups such as clips and shields are also there to be discovered, but for now here's the full armoury of guns:



STANDARD SINGLE SHOT:

Not that bad for an introductory weapon, it's advisable to use this from a distance and keep out of the way of incoming fire.



DOUBLE SHOT:

Much meatier the the Standard Single Shot and essential to find to combat tougher opposition as the game progresses.



RAPID SHOT:

The most user friendly method of destruction, with not much call for aiming and a very satisfying bit of kit to wield.



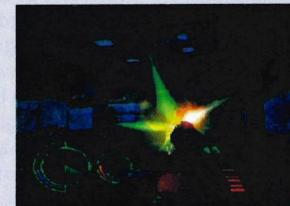
SINGLE BEAM LASER:

A very powerful weapon which stops the enemy dead in their tracks. Requires greater accuracy but well worth the effort.



DUEL BEAM LASER:

The Duel Beam Laser is great to rely on in a tight spot and effective for sweeping areas crack commando style.



WIDE BURST LASER:

The Wide Burst Laser is one of those power hungry weapons that plays with your nerves while you wait for recharging.



MISSILE LAUNCHER:

Do not select this weapon unless there is plenty of room to swing a cat. Loose off at short range and your energy will suffer.



MINES:

These little babies have fuses that unfortunately last for only a few short seconds. Drop out in the open a show clean heels.



GRENADE:

Tricky little buggers that have a tendency to go off in your face. Familiarising yourself with their use will cost much of your health.

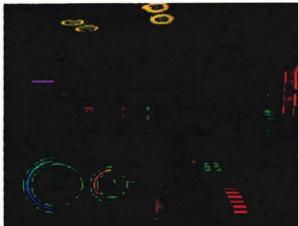
**POWER UPS,
COLOURED
KEYS AND A
FIRST PERSON
PERSPECTIVE.
THIS MAY
SOUND FAMIL-
IAR BUT PRO-
GRAMMERS
CLAIM TO HAVE
PRODUCED THE
DEFINITIVE 3D
BLAST.**

position and crawl through dark ventilation shafts. Psygnosis claim that this project has been designed to offer the chance of a big screen interactive experience. Wander around claustrophobic corridors, walk out into larger temple areas to be confronted by oversized statues, descend into cellars, everything is constructed using light sourced silicon graphics, with a shadowy feel. Frames run at the rate of 30 per second, so expect appearance to be matched by break neck speed.

QUALITY SPRITES

Getting up close to the enemy in *Doom* type games is a disappointing experience by anyone's standards, that tends to dispel any of the intense atmosphere that they work so hard to create. Monsters suffer from enlarged pixels (quite a nasty complaint we hear), bearing more of a resemblance to one of those machine knitting patterns than to anything remotely scary; although we all know how horrible those home-knitted jumpers of Granny's can turn out.

As a real breath of fresh air, *Tenka*'s sprites are multi-polygon, three dimensional, texture mapped affairs. Exceptionally detailed with well defined and realistic facial expressions, at present there are 17 varieties of these mutants in total. All are recognisable as individuals and looking like the stuff nightmares are made from. A lot of time and effort seems to have been spent getting the gruesome factor as high as pos-



sible with some disturbing hacked around features.

The get a coloured key to open locked doors format has been retained from ancestors, but a cerebral dimension has been added into the blender as a puzzle must now be solved before each of the 30 odd levels can be completed. None of these have been made too tricky or obscure so players shouldn't suffer from frustration at not knowing their next move. Another interesting and novel addition is the way flashing tracking beacons have replaced any normal kind of map. These are dropped in important locations to indicate routes that have already been taken, or by unaccessible areas, but where you place these devices is left to your own discretion and be warned: finding your way around the large levels looks to be pretty confusing at times.



Once missions have been completed, players will be treated to full



TENKA GLOSSARY

THE BIONOIDS.

Constructed from a combination of human body parts and mechanical implants, these cyborgs are created as experimental troopers and law enforcement agents. Loyalty is unquestionable as orders are always followed to the letter. Brain cells have been altered and are focused totally on survival and military techniques making these units the ultimate warriors. Production has gone through four levels of technology, each version surpassing the previous creation in terms of both strength and intelligence.

BIONOID CONVERSION PROCESS.

The cerebral cortex is responsible for collecting information from the senses, analysing and processing data, allowing the nervous system to consciously react to situations. Bionoid conversion utilises an organic computer package termed Instruction Controlled Movement (ICM) which is introduced into the cerebral cortex. Once installed it takes control of information collected by the senses and, directed by TROJAN created programs, co-ordinates the movements of the host body. ICM is able to learn and adapt to new situations.

TROJAN INC. AND CONSTRUCT INC.

Largest corporation in the known universe, TROJAN inc. is the epitome of capitalism out of control. For the past three years this group has been operating the off-world colonies, luring the world's populous with the promise of a better life, but in truth murdering the powerless for spare parts or kidnapping for experimentation. Research is being carried out on a large scale into biological warfare techniques, top secret military weaponry and genetic alteration. Constructa inc. are heavily funded by military organisations and work closely with TROJAN inc., offering technical expertise and equipment for methods of constructing Bionoids on a major scale.

ZENITH.

The Rebellion organisation has stolen TROJAN inc.'s. ICM package and rewritten code, creating the Zero Energy Neural Intelligent Transmitting Hack. If introduced into the central computer network, all Bionoids would become infected with its untraceable command structure. ZENITH would turn Bionoids against one another and teach them to disobey orders and destroy their masters.

motion video cut sequences which promise huge explosions and should provide a satisfying conclusion to plenty of hard work. Atmospheric music in Dolby pro-logic sound is to be accompanied by narration from well known cult movie stars, hopefully leading to a product that should completely emerge the senses.

Psygnosis have undoubtedly set themselves a pretty daunting task when they say they want to change the face of this genre forever, and if it were a less experienced outfit, just how much

further a *Doom* like game could be taken would be debatable. Remember what these programming geniuses have achieved in the past, how well produced and sumptuous their games have always proved and feel the anticipation of the possibility that *Tenka* will live up to its own hype. Now try and live with yourself until the finished article appears somewhere in a software store near you in sometime late February this year – good luck, you may need it.



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THE SCOTTISH SIDE WATCH AS THE ENGLAND KICK SAILS INTO THE STADIUM AND OUT OF PLAY.

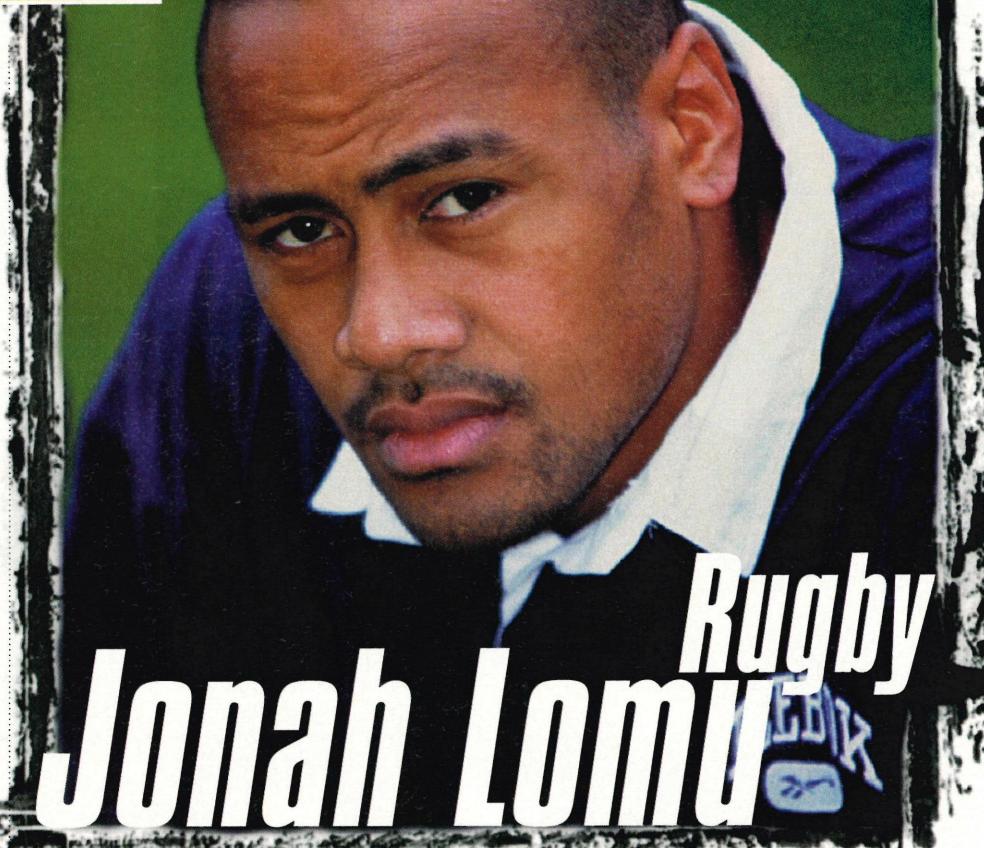


Considering its broad appeal, it's somewhat surprising that there aren't more Rugby simulations for home systems. Following a couple of dire Amiga attempts, EA poked a toe in the waters a few years back with a solid enough effort for the Megadrive which was essentially an extension of the *FIFA* engine, but since then fans of the sport have been sadly neglected. Step up Codemasters with new development cohorts, Rage, to fill the gap, with Codemasters following their *Sampras* license with a game endorsed by an equally hot sporting property: Rugby's current wunderkind, Jonah Lomu.

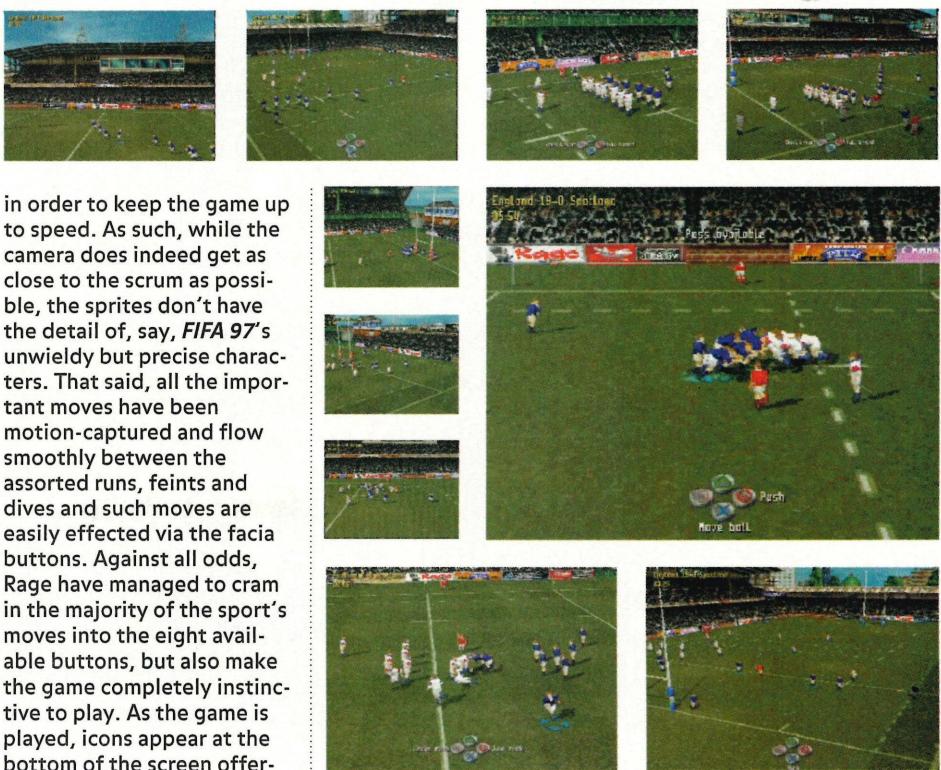
Lomu is the instantly recognisable face of the sport, and became Rugby's equivalent to Gazza (albeit without the controversy) as he steamrollered Will Carling in the Five Nations tournament. One of the greatest problems with past Rugby games – and presumably the reason there are so few – is that they fail to convey the rough nature of the sport, with sprites often bouncing off each other as opposed to the crunching tackles and dirty tricks of the real thing. Rage have attempted to get around this obstacle by bravely using large sprites to depict the action. On first sight, *Lomu Rugby* resembles the 16bit incarnations of *FIFA* with the familiar isometric view used for an overview of the pitch, and a number of swooping camera effects zooming in and out as the action dictates.

ROUGH DIAMOND
Rage have kept the fancy visual effects to a minimum

Release : MARCH '97
Company : CODEMASTERS
Price : TBA
Players : 1-4
Genre : SPORTS SIM



Rugby Jonah Lomu



in order to keep the game up to speed. As such, while the camera does indeed get as close to the scrum as possible, the sprites don't have the detail of, say, *FIFA 97*'s unwieldy but precise characters. That said, all the important moves have been motion-captured and flow smoothly between the assorted runs, feints and dives and such moves are easily effected via the facia buttons. Against all odds, Rage have managed to cram in the majority of the sport's moves into the eight available buttons, but also make the game completely instinctive to play. As the game is played, icons appear at the bottom of the screen offer-

ing control advice, and the moves available. For example, during a line-out (Rugby's equivalent to a throw-in), the player is offered the choice of either a long or a short line-out, while scrums are equally well covered, with the help system indicating when a pass is available, or if the player wants to try and push the pack forward.

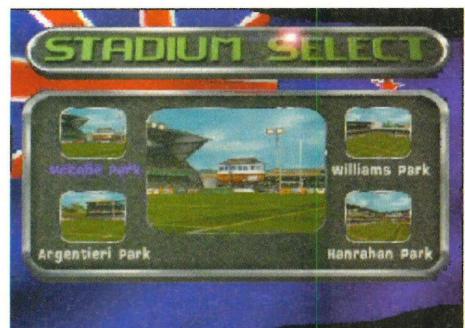
By far the best use of the PlayStation joypad, however, is saved for one of the most integral aspects of the game. In Rugby, the ball must always be passed backwards, and thus huge lines of forwards run in a V formation, awaiting the pass if the person in possession is tackled. *Lomu Rugby* tackles this tricky manoeuvre brilliantly, with the camera panning out to reveal the offensive formation, and the L1 and R1 buttons used to effect the pass. The use of the two shoulder buttons is absolutely inspired and feels so right for the game, and as simple



AT ANY TIME DURING PLAY, A LIST OF IN-PLAY STATISTICS CAN BE SUMMONED, DETAILING THE ACCURACY OF PASSES, SHOTS AND THE NUMBER OF FOULS COMMITTED.



few games, the ref is likely to be very busy, interceding whenever a tackle gets too rough or a bundle of players are scrabbling for the ball. As mentioned, Rage were keen to keep the speed of the game within realistic boundaries, but also wanted to emphasise the physical nature of the sport. This they have achieved admirably. As the player's on screen Carling runs with the ball, they are mobbed by oncoming defenders, with the familiar 'Rugby' tackles coming thick and fast as the CPU-controlled sprites make a des-



an idea as it may seem it is difficult to convey just how much the game benefits from the use of the system – the X or circle buttons just wouldn't be instinctive enough.

MAKING A PASS

In addition to the superb passing system, kicking and catching are also easy to pull off. The X button is used for the majority of play, and if running towards a ball as it

descends, it sends the player jumping up for the catch. Similarly, once in possession, pressing it again will punt the ball up field, with the length the button is depressed determining the strength of the kick. As the two teams battle it out, an on screen referee is on hand to preside over the game, penalising rough play and indicating when the ball is out of play. During the first

perate grab for legs, or make do with bundling the attacker off the pitch for a line-out – and in true Rugby style it is possible to send more players into the fracas to stamp on a few of their heads.

GROUNDS FOR ACTION

Lomu's input to the game ends at lending his name and face, but Codemasters have tried to incorporate all the major tournaments into the code. On loading the game, the player is invited to select from a number of tournaments on offer, with friendly matches running alongside a World Cup mode, and the invitation to a similar tournament wherein the competition can be selected from a



INTO TOUCH

Foul play often results in a penalty kick to the opposition, and Rage have created a simple but effective kick system for taking them. On placing the ball, a yellow arrow is used to line the shot, with the length of the arrow determining the run up taken, and thus the power of the shot. Depending on the wind conditions, the ball should sail through the H-shaped goal post, with three extra points the reward. The same system is used for the kicks awarded after every try, with Rage even adding the two flag-carrying linesmen who indicate whether the kick was successful.



DEVELOPERS RAGE HAVE MADE THINGS EASIER BY DISPLAYING GAME OPTIONS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SCREEN.

BEFORE A KICK IS TAKEN, THE BALL CAN BE POSITIONED ALONG A SMALL VERTICAL AXIS. HAVING PLACED THE KICK, THE ANGLE AND POWER IS THEN DETERMINED.

further menu. Having selected the relevant game mode, a wide selection of familiar teams are offered. In addition to the expected English, All-Black and Australian entries, the game's difficulty mode is determined by the quality of opposition chosen, with Wales ranked fairly highly and the likes of Germany ranked as a walk-over – it's nice to know we can beat them at something. Needless to say, Lomu's All-Black side is the game's toughest challenge, and as each match is prepared, team details and high points in each team's history are highlighted as the game loads.

Jonah Lomu Rugby was a real gamble by Codemasters, but early indications are that it should prove rather playable and easy to pick up. The control system is a real winner, and while the graphics are as rough as some of the real thing's 'characters' (stand up Brian Moore), Codemasters have a potential champion in Lomu when it is released in March this year.

THE THREE VIKINGS OFTEN MEET OTHER CHARACTERS ON THEIR QUEST, SOME WHO ARE WILLING TO HELP THEM, OTHERS WHO JUST WANT THEIR BLOOD.



The Lost Vikings 2

Something very odd is happening – the PlayStation is suddenly awash with sequel without even the original games appearing. Games like *Wing Commander III* are already on the shelves, but the first game game (and the second, for that matter) is nowhere in sight. Final

Fantasy VII is another prime example – what about the six other games? It seems the boundaries of technology are constantly pushed further back, and with the PlayStation being on the cutting edge of video-gaming there's no point releasing a game's that's years old. That's why Interplay has *The Lost Vikings 2*, even though most people didn't even know they'd disappeared in the first place. Obviously they did though, when *The Lost Vikings* was

released almost five years ago on both the Megadrive and Super Nintendo to surprising critical acclaim. Anyway, *The Lost Vikings* followed the adventures of three... um, lost Vikings, as they tried to find their way back home. Norse-napped by a green-skinned alien and teleported through time and space, Baleog the Fierce, Olaf the Stout and Erik the Swift had to join forces to defeat the monsters and solve the wicked puzzles set by the evil Tomator. Then,

and only then, could they return to a normal life of rapping and pillaging...

Of Course, Olaf and company crushed Tomator the first time around, but now he's back for revenge. Surprise.

LET'S DO THE TIME WARP

So the bumbling bearded blokes are back, ready to tackle the unknown with little more than their bare fists. Taking a well-deserved break after the life-threatening battle with Tomator, the

LOST IN TIME

Baleog, Erik and Olaf are hopelessly lost. Catapulted through time and space after a freak system failure aboard Tomator's ship, the three Vikings are flung back into Transylvania, where they're haunted by all manner of nasties. The Dark Ages is filled with sword-swinging knights who block Baleog's attacks with their shields, while Hell is just... Hell. Throughout their quest the Vikings venture to many other places, including a jungle infested with man-eating plants, and even Tomator's hidden lair. Oooh.



Release : MARCH

Company : INTERPLAY

Price : TBA

Players : 1

Genre : ADVENTURE



ERIK AND THE BOYS CAN PICK UP VARIOUS OBJECTS THROUGHOUT EACH LEVEL. FOOD RESTORES ENERGY WHILE A BOMB WILL BLOW A HOLE IN NEARBY WALLS.



threesome leave their Viking village for a relaxing fishing trip in their long boat. Rather predictably it's not the welcome break they were looking for and within second Tomator and caught them in his teleporter and has beamed the hapless Vikings back aboard his spaceship. Lady is luck is on our boys' side though, and rather than being thrown in the gladiator arena where death have have been a certainty, the trio are warped through time and unceremoniously dumped in spooky Transylvania.

This is where the adventure begins, with Baleog, Erik and Olaf stranded in a unfamiliar land, without only a friendly witch to help them. Yep, all would be lost were it not for the scary hag who promises to send the Vikings back home, proving they give her the ingredients she needs for her spells. They oblige, of course, and must find the objects which are scattered around the level.

The initial levels serves as a gentle introduction to the game, with information boxes giving obvious clues to the skills of each individual Viking, and when and how to use them. For example, when faced by large, seemingly uncrossable chasm, a panel will reveal that "Erik can leap long distances, thanks to his rocket boots." Hmm, not exactly cryptic, eh?

WE THREE 'KINGS'

Learning the pros and cons of each character is vital, if not for the early levels then definitely for when Baleog and boys near Tomator's lair. It's not easy though, as they all have such diverse skills. Take Erik the Swift as an example. In the game he was a scrawny wretch who could run with incredible speed, jump in the air, swim like a fish and knock down walls by head-butting them. For the sequel his abilities remain pretty much the same, but this time he, along with Baleog and Olaf, has got the benefits of cybernetics. Having stolen the robotic parts just before they were warped from Tomator's ship, the Vikings have distributed the parts between them. Therefore Erik has rocket boot, which give him that extra boost to reach high ledges or clear wide gaps.

Olaf, on the other hand, stole the shield. This allows him to protect the others from harm, as well as using the shield as a make-shift parachute to glide slowly down from great heights. The shield also has another hidden extra – by crouching down Olaf is shrunk to the size of a dwarf, enabling him to squeeze through gaps too that would otherwise be too small. As for Olaf's other, erm, talent, fat boy can let rip with somewhat earth-shattering result. His farts can crumble rock, and also give him a rocket boost when he's gliding with his shield.

Lastly there's Baleog, the warrior of the pack.



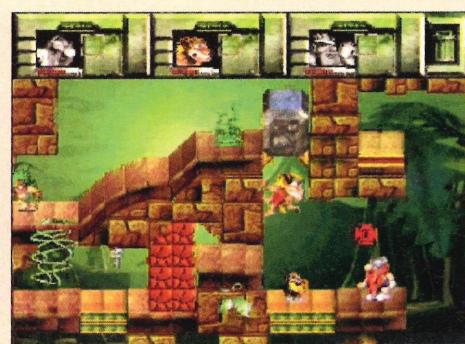
Therefore he snatched the bionic arm and the energy sabre, which he now uses instead his old rusty sword. While the sabre can only be used to hack at the enemy, the bionic arm is far more versatile. It can be used to punch out at an enemy, to either side or up in the air. Alternatively it can be used to activate switches that are difficult to reach, or pick up objects hidden behind gates. The bionic arm's most impressive use is that it doubles up as a whip, lassoing a ledge and allowing him to swing across to other sections of the level.

MAKE TOMATOR SAUCE

The fearless threesome are joined by two other characters too, who appear at different stages through the game. Fang, a werewolf,

appears first, and helps the Vikings providing they release him from his cage. Having escaped Fang can attack enemies with his teeth, and is capable of clambering up sheer rock faces, clinging to the surface with his razor-sharp claws. Scroch the Dragon isn't quite so undignified, and prefers to fly using his tiny green wings. He breathes fire, of course, and is therefore a formidable ally when it comes to dealing with Tomator's thugs.

However, no amount dragon's breath and wolf bites will defeat Tomator himself. Even before they reach the the big, green-skinned one they have to think laterally to solve the puzzles and act fast to defeat the nasties. Then at last, they just might get back in time to catch last orders at the local ale house.



THE HIDDEN CHARACTERS ARE FOUND USING SPECIAL COMBINATIONS OF BUTTON PRESSES, ALTHOUGH GOUKI/AKUMA IS THE GAME'S FINAL BOSS, AND IS INCREDIBLY HARD TO BEAT.



Super puzzle Fighter 2

in their eight-year history, Capcom's World Warriors have been repeatedly chopped and changed in order to keep the *Street Fighter* series fresh. With only Ken, Ryu and Sagat appearing in every game, and the likes of Dee-Jay, Cammy and Blanka but distant memories, fans of the combat genre eagerly await the latest installments of 2D sparring and the new gameplay additions each new update invariably brings. Now, however, Capcom are using their most popular franchise to spearhead their very first entry into the puzzle genre, with Chun-Li, Ryu and a handful of the other World Warriors stepping away from high and low-powered kicks and punches, and trying their hand at the age-old puzzle game concept of linking together like-coloured blocks.

As with countless puzzle games before, *Super Puzzle Fighter 2* is a blend of simplistic ideas mixed with mad-

dening gameplay. The game screen is split vertically into two play areas, into which drop the aforementioned coloured squares. With a small inset screen detailing which pairs of colours are to drop next, the basic aim is for the player to clear their half of the screen by removing the said blocks, after which the residue appears in the opponent's half. It's an idea familiar to anyone who has played *Puyo-Puyo* on a past system, and one which also seems reminiscent of Sega's *Columns* title for the Megadrive a few years back.

ROUND THE BLOCK
As the coloured blocks are linked into square or rectangular groups of four or more, they automatically merge into a larger crystal, and the screen gradually starts to fill with an assortment of these larger gems and the smaller ones. However, every now and then, rotating circular discs drop into the play area, and like the blocks these come in the same colours. By linking a like-coloured disc with a number of blocks, any blocks of that denomination are obliterated, allowing those above to settle into

their space. Every time a player removes a selection of blocks from their side of the screen, they are automatically dropped in to the opponent's half of the screen. However, rather than automatically merging in with the blocks already there, blocks which fall into a play area are numbered from one to five. This indicates how many blocks must be dropped into the screen before they revert to normal (the colouring of the number indicates their final state), and the numeric blocks prove



Release : TBA
Company : VIRGIN/CAPCOM
Price : £TBA
Players : 1-2
Genre : PUZZLE



essential when trying to prevent an opponent creating large blocks – as they can fall in the most awkward places.

The real skill to successful Puzzle Fighting, though, is to create chain reactions of falling blocks which send huge quantities of the numeric blocks towards the opponent. These are effected by piling several of the coloured discs at strategic points across the screen, before using one to remove one of the larger blocks. This in turn brings more and more of the discs into contact with like-coloured blocks, and a 'Chain' counter at the bottom of the screen tots up exactly how many sequences are managed.

MIDDLE MEN

While the two main play areas are being filled and emptied, two young-looking *Street Fighter* sprites occupy the central area of the screen. The game opens by inviting the player to select their Capcom hero from one of the eight available. There is an even balance of *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalkers* heroes on offer, with Ken, Ryu,



Chun-Li and Sakura lining up alongside Morrigan, Donovan, Felicia, and Lei-Lei. In a very clever link to Capcom's beat 'em up collections, each character boasts special skills, and each is even given a counter colour which reduces the number of blocks an opponent sends over, and can even completely 'Counter' a move in a nice nod to *Street Fighter Alpha*. During the actual game, the two sprites stand within the central area of the screen, and goad each other with small punches, kicks and taunts as groups of numbered blocks are sent to the other side. However, as the larger blocks are cleared, the characters use recognisable moves from past Capcom games to emphasise the skill used – with Ken and Ryu pulling off mixtures of fireballs and Dragon Punches, while Felicia uses low kicks. Capcom's attempt at branding a different genre with the *Street Fighter* name could have been an almighty failure and just a token gesture to add extra sales, but the special moves are extremely rewarding, and if a



FAMILIAR STREET FIGHTER AND DARKSTALKERS TOUCHES ARE PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE GAME, WITH THE CHARACTERS TAUNTING, USING SPECIAL MOVES, AND STUNNING EFFECTS SEEN IN PREVIOUS CAPCOM BEAT 'EM UPS.



LOOKS FAMILIAR

While the brain-stretching business of block organisation continues, die-hard *Street Fighter* fans should keep an eye out for a number of recognisable World Warrior features which are peppered throughout *Street Puzzle Fighter 2*. On selecting a character, for example, their costume colour depends on which button is used to select them, while each victory is followed by the traditional post-bout goading message. In one-player mode, the player works their way through the seven other characters as they would in the beat 'em up games, before facing a CPU-controlled version of their own character, who paves the way for a final battle against Gouki, the game's boss. And true to form, Gouki is one tough sod to beat...



ny's commitment to enter other genres. A number of easily identifiable Capcom traits can be found within the game, from the aforementioned combos, and 'Counters', to the special moves the younger-looking sprites use. In keeping with the most popular *Street Fighter* trend, the development team have also secreted a number of hidden characters within the game, with Dan, Gouki (Akuma), and a secret *Darkstalkers* favourite available if a set pattern of Dpad manipulations are used. All game mode bases are covered, too, with a one and two-player game, varying degrees of CPU intelligence, and puzzle options. Although it has yet to be officially confirmed, it seems likely Virgin will be releasing *Puzzle Fighter* on to these shores early in 1997, as the ongoing Capcom deal continues.

THE COMBINATION OF THE LARGER CRYSTALS SEND WALLS OF NUMBERED BLOCKS OVER TO THE OPPONENT'S SIDE OF THE SCREEN, BUT THESE CAN BE COUNTERED IF THE OPPONENT SENDS A SIMILAR BUNCH BACK.



Remember *Lone Soldier*? You probably do, for all the wrong reasons. *Tempest*, the team behind it, are back, and may just redeem themselves with their latest game, *Excalibur 2555AD*. It's an RPG in everything but looks and speed, because it plays like a very fast and wonderfully light sourced cousin of *Fade To Black*, with comparisons to *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil* thrown in. The plot goes like this: the Kala, a band of knights from the future have travelled back in time, Terminator-style to the middle ages and stolen King Arthur's magical sword Excalibur. You, as Beth, the niece of the wizard Merlin, are sent into the future to retrieve the sword, and restore the balance of power in your world. When Beth reaches the future, she finds that the human race has been forced under-



ground after a giant meteor strike has rendered the Earth's surface uninhabitable. Beginning on the level nearest the surface, she must work her way



deeper and deeper into Salto, the future dweller's complex, with each level being more lavish than the one before, until she reaches the final inner sanctum, where the mighty



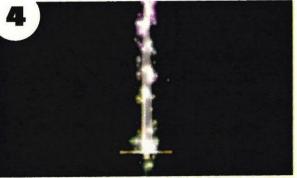
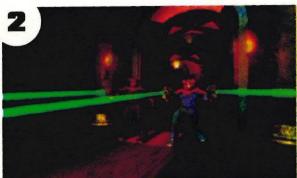
Excalibur rests with Delavar, leader of the Kala.

THE SPEED OF LIGHT
The first thing that strikes you when you play *Excalibur* is the speed at which the game engine runs. Considering that each of the 12 levels contain between 40 and 50 rooms, with a huge number of varying textures and a lot of lightsourcing, you would understand (even in these post-*Tomb Raider* days) if there was any slowdown. Incredibly though, there isn't any, making for an RPG which actually has enough speed to make it qualify for arcade status. The game can be viewed in two ways, from just behind Beth, and from a number of fixed cameras a la *Resident Evil*. Just like the Capcom classic, they allow you a great view of your surroundings, while being positioned well enough to avoid any problems when confronting enemies. This is

not the ideal view to play the game from, but it is useful when looking for doors and objects, and also for truly appreciating some of the beautiful rooms that you will find yourself in.

SWORD AND SORCERY
While most of Beth's problems are in the form of puzzles, there are a number of occasions when only might will make right, and the sword has to come into play. The combat system is not central to the game, but it is intuitive enough not to appear to have tacked simply for the sake of it. To fight, you must first put Beth into her attack stance by pressing one of the shoulder buttons. This gives you access to her many attacking moves, which include a number of sword strikes and kicks, as well as some yet to be confirmed special moves activated by numerous button presses. The enemies you face are

Release : MARCH '97
Company : TELSTAR
Price : £44.95
Players : 1
Genre : RPG

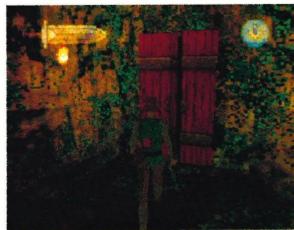


(TOP LEFT) YOUR QUEST BEGINS HERE IN THE MIDDLE AGES, AS THE KALA KNIGHTS, SENT FROM THE FUTURE ON THEIR EVIL QUEST TO STEAL EXCALIBUR, EASILY SLAUGHTERING YOUR PEOPLE BEFORE RETURNING TO THE FUTURE.

(LEFT) AS YOU CAN SEE, THE LIGHT SOURCING EASILY MATCHES UP TO THE STANDARDS SET BY TOMB RAIDER.



THIS IS JUST ONE OF THE MANY CLAY CHARACTER MODELS DIGITISED BY DEVELOPERS TEMPEST, ALLOWING THEM TO GIVE EVEN MORE DETAIL TO THE FACES OF THE PEOPLE YOU WILL MEET IN THE WORLD OF SALTO.



often better armed than you, the gun toting Calmigh soldiers will fire huge bolts of energy at you while you try to get close enough to engage in hand to hand combat. There are of course, a number of enemies, like the scorpion and zombie who,

lacking any kind of missile weapon, will just get stuck in. The magical side of things is obviously a lot more complicated, since there is much power to be had from the mastery of magic. To gain a spell, Beth must first find the recipe, which will state the ingredients needed to make the spell work. Then the ingredients have to be found and combined to add the spell to your spell book, and thus increase your magical powers. These spells can be critical to your success, since a lot of the puzzles require magic in order to solve them. For instance, a healing spell, used on an injured character, will make them grateful enough to help you in your quest.

LET'S TALK

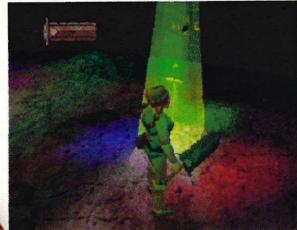
Character interaction is essential in any RPG, but far from simply using text to get the message across,

Tempest have tried to make the conversations worth listening to, not least because they are essential to your quest. The conversations are one way only, in that people only



speak to you, telling you what they want, or offering clues to your quest. While this may come in for criticism, it saves on having to sit through the incredibly long conversations packed with 'humorous' jokes in order to give atmosphere in spades, and the one-sided conversations speed up, rather than delay the flow of the game, while giving

you the feeling that you are interacting with the characters. This interaction is increased by some characters being seen in close-up when they speak, with their words lip-synced for greater effect. This has been achieved by digitising clay models into wire frames and then animating them in real time rather than rendering them, which cuts down on loading times, as well as allowing you to view the speaker's face from different angles as they tell you their information. With this kind of attention to detail, and mixture of depth and speed, *Excalibur 2555AD* is certainly looking like a game to be reckoned with.



A CAST OF DOZENS

THERE ARE OVER EIGHTY DIFFERENT CHARACTERS IN EXCALIBUR 2555AD, SOME WHO ARE MERELY THERE TO FIGHT YOU, AND OTHERS WHO WILL REQUIRE SOMETHING FROM YOU IN ORDER TO ASSIST YOU IN YOUR QUEST.



KALA KNIGHTS

These are the elite knights of the underground city, and are armed with massive energy cannons. They are the enemy that you will encounter most often on your travels. Beware!

THE MARKET TRADER

This merchant will help you past an impenetrable force field by telling you the location of a secret passage. One of the few people who gives you information without asking for anything in return.

FABIAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

The FFF are an underground resistance movement who seek to overthrow the hierarchy of Salto. They will help your mission, but first you will have to prove yourself to their leader Oscar Lemei.

MAD MICK

This insane-looking, ginger bearded Scotsman appears throughout the game to hinder your progress as much as possible. But as your journey reaches its end, is he all that he appears to be?

SCORPION

You will find the scorpions in the early sections of Salto. They, like the gruesome skeletons are among the non-human enemies you will find as your quest takes you into the Ort levels.

MECHANISED
COMBAT IN
THE FAR FLUNG
FUTURE. STRAP
YOURSELF
INTO THE
COCKPIT OF A
HUGE SUIT OF
BATTLE
ARMOUR AND
GO FOR SOME
HEAVY BLAST-
ING FUN.

MechWarrior 2

released a year ago onto the new range of Pentium PCs that were just hitting the market at that time, *MechWarrior 2* instantly won friends with its mixture of blasting action, 3D environments and storyline from the BattleTech roll playing games and books. Fast and smooth, with loads of missions to tackle, it was one of those Elite like games which was very easy to get lost in for hours at a time, striking a balance between mindless zapping and strategy.

Set in the year 3057, two Clans of MechWarriors have suffered dishonourable defeat against the combined forces of the Inner Sphere during the bloody Exodus Civil War. After the losing the Battle of Tukayyid, leaders have reluctantly agreed to honour a cease fire treaty that prohibits another invasion within Terran space for the next fifteen years and after regrouping, the Clans have retreated to formerly conquered worlds to heal their wounds.



In battle, the Jade Falcon and Wolf divisions were united against a common foe, but now things have calmed down each blames the other for defeat. Obviously bored to tears by the idea of peace and harmony, fierce infighting has broken out between the two groups. Both are desperately attempting to salvage lost honour, hoping to establish themselves as the most powerful respected and feared Clan.

MechWarriors fight from inside the cramped up interior of huge two legged war machines called BattleMechs, taking their vehicles across the many terrains of their solar system - it's a great way to see the Galaxy. Each hopes to move up combat ranks by building up honour points as top notch pilots, with the ultimate

goal of becoming their Clan's leader, or Khan as they prefer to be called. If they achieve this daunting task the reward will be to lead the vengeful attack to regain Terra the moment that the truce elapses.

Take on the role of Elemental, warriors genetically bred as giants specifically to handle the oversized battle suits. Pledge allegiance to a particular Clan and then take part in various trials within your sect to prove your worth, or embark on a series of missions to win territory and ultimate supremacy. Please your war council to receive much needed recognition and a senior ranking but do be careful not to bring dishonour on yourself or to your blood line.

RE-SPRAY OR REBUILD?

According to Activision, programmers have completely redesigned *MechWarrior 2* rather than producing a straight port to the PlayStation. Frame rate has been increased, lighting effects enhanced and 3D texture mapping is now more detailed. Players can also collect brand new power ups, including invisibility; invulnerability; better jump jets; more heat sinks to increase rapid fire capability and repairs for the suit control



Release : FEBRUARY '97
Company : ACTIVISION
Price : £44.95
Players : 1
Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP



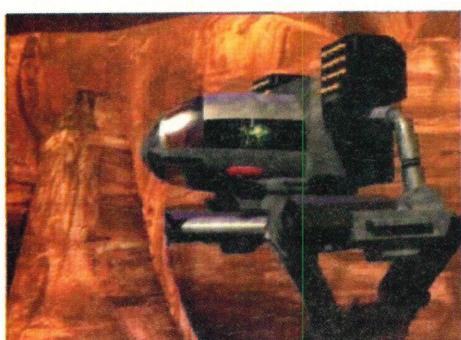
EVERYTHING LOOKS FAIRLY SIMILAR TO THE PC VERSION, WHICH HAD RATHER BASIC GRAPHICS, BUT CHANGES MAY STILL BE MADE BEFORE THE PLAYSTATION VERSION GETS RELEASED.



systems and weapons.

Before getting seriously into the action, it looks like it might be advisable to take advantage of the training section of the game as these machines are fairly complicated beasts. A tutor is on hand to guide you through the use of navigational computers, Mech handling techniques, hunting down prey, inspection of targets and best of the use of the many weapons on offer. It's also possible to put yourself through a trial at this stage to gain basic rank and with the right to join a Clan.

An option is also available for instant action, which could be useful for perfecting your skills against particular classes of warriors. Rather than go through the rigmarole of attempting to complete complicated missions each time you want a bit of blasting action, this feature enables you to select your own Mech, followed by the class of your opponent then pick a planet for head to head warfare. At this stage it's possible to link up with a friend co-operatively or against each other.



CAREER PROSPECTS

In full blown career mode 50 battle missions have been included, objectives ranging from basic reconnaissance, to attacking convoys of hover trains, identifying and destroying traitor Mechs and disabling strategic targets such as satellite uplinks and communications arrays. Each of the scenarios takes place on a variety of worlds which have unique environmental conditions and various kinds of terrain to stomp across such as urban cityscapes, deserts and icy wastes.

Loads of classes of Mechs are there for your perusal ranked in order of weight, which restricts what can be carried on board. Customisation of these machines looks like an engrossing feature and could

be essential if tasks are to be completed within the fairly limited allotted time. Devices to keep guns from overheating, clusters of lasers, missiles, pulse weapons, jump jets and other equipment all need to be shifted around the internal structure within tight limits of space.

Inside the cockpit, Activision have gone for a sim feel with a standard looking radar, compass bearing and pitch displays, toggled read out of weapons, core temperature gauge, damage indicator, speed bar and a box that shows the currently selected target. Turret direction can be altered independently, distant objects can be zoomed in on for long range attacks and the drop cam gives you views from outside the battle suit.

Taking out enemy Mech

IN THE BEGINNING...

MechWarrior 2 is taken from the *BattleTech Universe*, created by FASA and was popular in the 80s when a new wave of futuristic style *Dungeon & Dragons* games hit the hobby shops. Using a series of manuals and scenario packs, players created their own gun touting mechanised warriors and went into battle using a variety of multi sided dice. Such were the lengths people were willing to go to in search of excitement before serious quality video games were invented.

Such was the popularity of this invention, *BattleTech* even spawned a number of novels that set out the dates and details of historic battles, described the heroics of Mech pilots and generally used plenty of fairly daft made up names like Kurultai and Ovkhant - very much in the style of Tolkein (on Acid and having forgotten how to write).

units requires accuracy and patience, rather than a gung-ho attitude and it's possible to discover weak spots, disable opponents by destroying limbs or reduce the risk of taking too many hits by aiming for weapons systems. Before all the buttons have been mastered though, inexperienced players better just pray for a critical hit because nothing in this game stands around waiting to be shot. Take a couple of hits yourself and the cockpit rolls and rocks about in a very, very worrying fashion.

At this stage of development the PlayStation version of *MechWarrior 2* looks fairly similar to that of the PC, with polygon environments that represent the features of worlds rather than offering startlingly realistic landscapes, but then things may still change, as they often do. However the game looks after completion, no doubt it will sell like hot cakes if it manages to capture the playability of the original.



Area 51



CONSECUTIVE HITS ARE TALLIED UP BY THE CPU AND THE PLAYER IS PROMOTED THROUGH THE RANKS AS THEY

TOT UP,

BEGINNING AS A PRIVATE, THE LOFTY HEIGHTS OF SERGEANT

AWAIT THE SHARPEST OF SHOOTERS.



The X-Files' incredible success has spawned previously unheard of interest in conspiracy theories and the possible visitations by extra terrestrials. Of all the UFO stories on the grapevine, the 'Roswell Incident' is probably the most infamous, and it is this that forms the basis for GT's conversion of a little-known coin-op. Roswell came to real prominence a year or so back as footage was shown of what appeared to be an alien autopsy. However, the footage has since been debunked as fake, yet even so the relative Internet sites are rife with such tales, and stories of supposed alien landings and experiments on humans.

Area 51 runs with the premise that aliens have indeed landed on Earth, albeit not by choice. A reptilian species – the Kronn – have crash-landed just outside Roswell, and have taken the opportunity to infiltrate the army base there, with all the soldiers present mutated into zombies to protect their inhuman masters. The Pentagon has got wind of the alien invasion and plan to cover it up by sending in a crack team of marines known only as STARR to wipe out the alien menace. As such, hot on the heels of *Die Hard Trilogy*'s in-screen shoot 'em up, Area

51 is a light gun compatible blaster, with the Kronn and their undead hordes prepared to fight to the bitter end to safeguard their first foothold in the build up to taking over the Earth.

HANGER 17

The taking of Area 51 is played out within a huge 3D base, with the camera scrolling across a preset route through each stage. Whereas *Die Hard*'s second stage was obviously very polygonal, *Area 51* graphics are a lot more detailed with the assorted corridors, rooms and exterior locations all pre-rendered. The level of detail is identical to that of the coin-op, and as the game progresses the player enters assorted warehouses surrounding the main complex, makes a daring run across the vehicle enclosure, and finally enters the alien-infested building. Although the route taken cannot be changed, the game tries to throw fresh ideas into the game with the addition of vehicles and derring-dos. For example, the vehicle enclosure sees the player commandeer a jeep, while the warehouse contains a jaunt in a handy fork lift truck. The most impressive sequence, though, is saved for the entrance to the alien base. As the jeep careers out

of control, a rope ladder from a STARR helicopter is lowered and flits across the screen as the jeep looks set to smash into the complex's perimeter wall. However, in true hero style, the player can only watch as they grasp hold of the ladder and swing through a tiny window and into the base as the jeep ploughs into the wall. Other examples along the same lines include scaling ladders, kicking open doors, and even blowing away certain parts of the screen to reveal previously hidden secret rooms.

AS SEEN ON FILM

As opposed to *Die Hard*'s polygon terrorists, the assorted zombies, STARR cohorts, and Kronn warriors in *Area 51* are actual digitised actors super-imposed on to the play area. As the game progresses, other members of your marine team run across the screen with the player providing cover, while the zombie hordes are fetchingly dressed in different

coloured boiler suits and suitably rotted skin. The game is compatible with the majority of PlayStation light guns, and as the zombies appear they blast away using the majority of the bases missile, rocket and ammo supplies, while others hang from ropes, or throw barrels of toxic waste. The Kronn troops don't make an appearance until the complex itself is entered, but the developers have emulated the coin-op and added a bypass mode so that the game's initial stages and the trek through a zombie-controlled warehouse can be skipped.

If a zombie remains on screen for too long they open fire, and one of five energy points are lost. Similarly, if



Release : MARCH

Company : GT

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-2

Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP



the larger objects such as rockets and barrels hit the player the screen rocks, and the screen 'cracks' and blood is smeared around the break to indicate the damage done. Thankfully, the odds aren't completely stacked against the player, and weapon crates and power-up icons line the route, just waiting for an accurate shot to relieve them of their contents. While the latter are self explanatory, the weapon crates contain more powerful shotguns and the occasional grenade which acts as a smart

bomb. Each collected weapon has a finite supply of ammo, although the basic STARR gun can be reloaded as many times as needed by moving the light gun away from the screen and pressing the trigger.

LET BATTLE COMMENCE

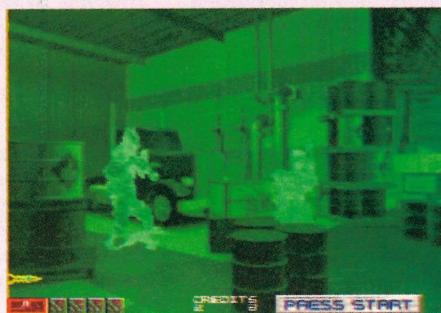
The player's performance is rewarded with promotions through the ranks, with a mixture of accurate shooting and low damage rewarded with a 'Streak'. These streaks make up the assorted

insignias given to Corporals and the higher ranks, and every time a number of zombies are shot in succession without missing, the screen informs the player of their newly-awarded promotion, while the scores are tallied at the end of the stage. *Area 51* is GT's first foray into the world of in-screen shoot 'em ups and promises to be the first of many as light gun sales begin to grow with Namco's *Time Crisis* stripping down its many guns in preparation for the battle ahead. Until then, owners of the Konami, Blaze or Spectravideo guns will be readying themselves for when *Area 51* opens its doors and reveals its secrets in March this year. The truth is in there...



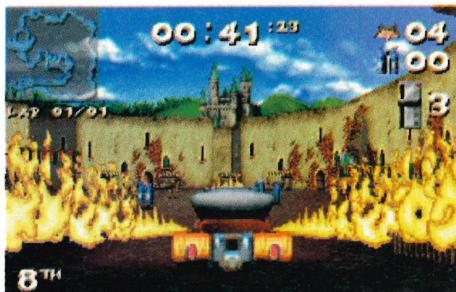
OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Area 51 contains a couple of neat ideas which add a touch of variety to the proceedings. While one or two players can attempt the mission, the developers have added a 'Cowboy' mode where a single player can use two guns for double the firepower! Similarly, as the game progresses members of your STARR team run across the screen and shooting them is penalised by the loss of energy. However, if the player deliberately shoots the first three STARR members seen in the game, a cheat mode is initiated with the screen turning green, and the enemy sprites replaced by glowing thermal images. This indicates that the player is now in 'Kronn' mode, and is seeing the game through one of the creature's eyes. It also has the handy side-effect that the intensity of the glows indicates how dangerous the foe is.



THE ROSWELL BASE IS THE LOCATION AT THE END OF THE GAME, AND AS THE PLAYER BLOWS AWAY THE ZOMBIE AND KRONN HORDES, ASSORTED UFO PARTS CAN BE SEEN IN THE BACKGROUND.

Wreckin' Crew



THE VARIETY OF TRACKS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES IN WRECKIN' CREW, WITH HUGE BACKGROUND FEATURES, SUCH AS THIS SPHINX ON THE AMUSEMENT PARK LEVEL, AS WELL AS DINOSAURS AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN!



The racing game is a genre which has always proved popular, partly because people love to drive, but also because of the many ways in which the subject can be approached without becoming boring. The PlayStation is no stranger to racing games, which along with beat-em-ups make up the most popular games for the system. With the release of *Formula One* and *WipEout 2097*, the serious end of the racing game market seems to have been well and truly sewn up by Psygnosis. On the more light-hearted *Mario Kart* style end though, there have been very few contenders, with only the recent release of *Street Racer* standing out from the pack. Now, Surrey-based developers Quickdraw hope to change this with the imminent release of their first game *Wreckin' Crew*, a madcap combination of *Mario Kart* gameplay and *Loaded* style weapons and characters, coupled with the fastest racing

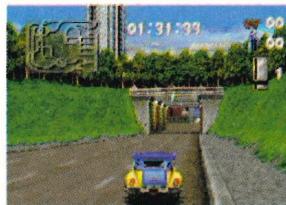
Release : MARCH

Company : TELSTAR

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-4

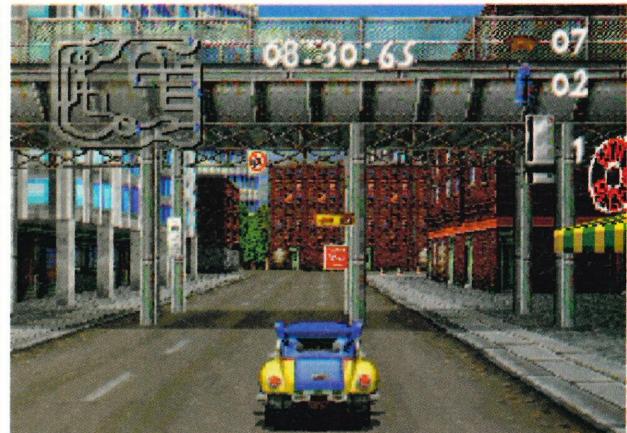
Genre : RACING



engine outside of a Ferrari. *Wreckin' Crew* firmly takes the place of being a purely fun racing game, with its array of strange characters in cartoon style cars racing on tracks littered around the world. Add to this a few new ideas and a split screen multiplayer mode, and you have something which could easily grab the fun racing market by the scruff of the neck.

DRIVERS, START YOUR SCREAMING

You initially have the choice between eight characters to race from, ranging from a fully armed Granny to a mad scientist, and far far beyond. There are also a couple of secret characters, one of which bears more than a passing resemblance to a certain gimp fellow from the film *Pulp Fiction*. They are all in possession of a 70s style hotrod as they race and riot across six tracks in pursuit of the chequered flag. All the characters have different attacks, such as Cheeba the



Rastafarian, who can strafe his enemies with machine gun fire from the side, or drop body bags (filled with bodies naturally) to slow down pursuing racers. These moves all cost stars, which can be picked up from the track, the more powerful the move, the more stars it will cost you. By learning special moves however, the use of stars can be bypassed, making for a much deadlier opponent who can fire at will. Spanner icons can be picked up to repair your vehicle, but even this is open to a bit of corruption since Lady Bird can drop fake spanners which will increase, rather than reduce the damage done to your vehicle.

TRICKY TRACKS

What immediately separates *Wreckin' Crew* from other racing games is that you don't have to drive the same route every time. You can take shortcuts and backstreets in order to beat the pack, which adds an extra level of depth to the gameplay as well as giving you a lot more freedom. The tracks themselves are lot more than mere background to the action itself, in many cases, they are the action. While the cars are rendered sprites, each track is made up of, on average, 500,000 polygons, while making no sacrifice to speed whatsoever. This of course makes them very pretty to look at, but the real thrill

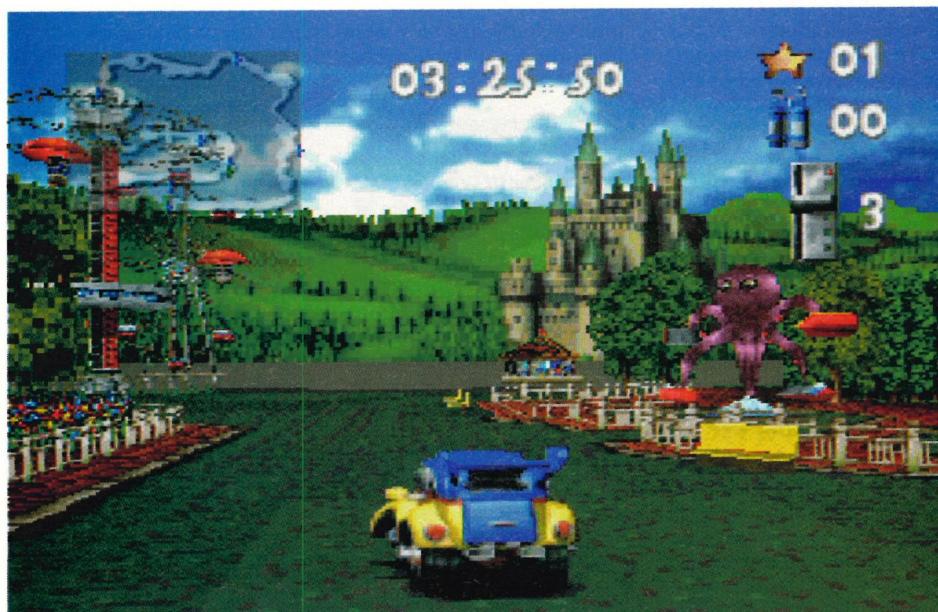


THESE HOTRODS LOOK THEY'RE OWNED BY THE OFFSPRING OF THE DUKES OF HAZZARD AND ZZ TOP. WHICH IS NO BAD THING.

comes from the level of interaction you have with the track itself and the obstacles which confront you. For instance, in the amusement park track there is a rotating pirate ship ride which you have to ride past, without getting hit by the rotating galleon. Elsewhere, there is a *Ridge Racer* style helicopter which passes over the track, dropping powerups in its wake. This, combined with the amazing track settings

(including New York and Cape Canaveral) makes for a race that is very pleasing to the eye, as well as allowing Quickdraw to really let rip with race features. The most bizarre of which is a game of space invaders which you play whilst driving on a massive overhead television screen, if you manage to take out all the aliens, powerups are yours for the taking!

Apart from the single player racing mode, there are



THIS LOOKS IMPRESSIVE STANDING STILL, SO JUST WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE IT MOVING! THERE'S AROUND HALF A MILLION POLYGONS OUT THERE SPEEDING PAST YOU, WHICH IS CERTAINLY ENOUGH TO MAKE ANYONE DIZZY.

WACKY RACERS

The different characters themselves are worthy of attention in their own right, due to the beautifully rendered cutscenes which introduce them, as well as the fact that unlike, say *Reloaded*, they all play significantly differently from each other. Here they are...

CANE AND ABLE

Twins of a very perverse sort, Cane and Able share the same body, and their bizarre appearance meant that when their plane crashed in the jungle they were subsequently worshipped like gods by the local tribe.



SIR CUSS

This ominous looking ringmaster looks like a cross between Charles Manson and Willy Wonka, and who are we to disagree?



KID KRAMIUM

Kid is a spoilt rich kid who looks like a reject from the Addams family, small in size but big on temper, underestimate him at your peril.



MA

If Kid is an extra from the Addams Family, then Ma is straight out of the Beverly Hillbillies. With her combination of a rocking chair and shotgun, she's not the sweet old lady her competitors wish she was.



LADY BIRD

This young lady is far from being the token female character of the crew, and you certainly wouldn't say that to the face of this psychotic ex-nun.



CHEEBA

This Rastafarian criminal is one dude you do not want to mess with, unless of course, you want to end up in one of his body bags.



DR NITROUS

Doc is your regular, everyday Mad Scientist, which puts him in good company. Well the mad part certainly does.



IQ

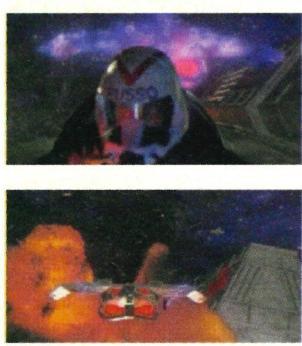
IQ seems to have been named very sarcastically. Not that this genetic experiment would be able to understand that. Or spell it.



Wing Commander IV



WING COMMANDER IV'S INTRODUCTION SEQUENCE SHOWS THE BLACK LANCE PIRATE ATTACK ON THE CONFEDERATE TRANSPORT VESSEL. WITHIN SECONDS THE BATTLE IS OVER.



Release : MARCH

Company : EA

Price : £TBA

Players : 1

Genre : ???



Could 1997 be the comeback year for Mark Hamill? Having disappeared from the lime-light after *Return of the Jedi*, Hamill went on to star in a handful of diabolical B-movies and trashy sci-fi films. Now, almost twenty years after his introduction to the silver screen, Hamill returns as Luke Skywalker when the *Star Wars* trilogy is once again shown at the cinema in its Special Edition guise.

This spring sees Hamill crop up on the PlayStation for the second time too, returning once to the role of Colonel Christopher Blair.

A handful of Hamill's cohorts return for the sequel too, with *Back to the Future*'s Tom Wilson returning as hot-shot pilot Maniac, John Rhys-Davies assuming the role of nice guy Paladin and the silver-haired Malcolm McDowell playing the tough Terran Admiral, Tolwyn. Chris Roberts returns to the director's chair too, breathing life into what promises to be the closest thing yet to an interactive movie on the

PlayStation – while *Wing Commander III* featured an all-star cast and a \$3 million budget, *Wing Commander IV* ups the stakes even more.

So, after the lukewarm reception given to *Wing Commander III*, Origin and Electronic Arts hope that this super-sequel will renew interest in the Terran's seemingly eternal struggle against the Kilrathi...

THE UNKNOWN ENEMY

At the end of *Wing Commander III* Colonel Blair had to engage the cream of the Kilrathi clan, dogfighting the traitorous Hobbes and finally taking on the mighty Prince Thrakath, which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Kilrathi empire. So, with the over-grown cat-men out of the equation, who

the hell is threatening mankind this time? Well, mankind is, apparently. With the Kilrathi no longer a problem, the Confederation thought peace had at last fallen across the galaxy, until a Terran convoy was mysteriously attacked. It wasn't until a scout team was sent out to investigate the ambush that the scale of the problem became clear – a band of space pirates known as The Black Lance have steadily grown in size and power, and are now capable of over-powering pretty much anything the Confederation can throw at them, thanks to the advanced cloaking technology employed by their starfighters. The Black Lance have already fielded its secret weapon, now it's the turn of



the Confederation to use theirs – Colonel Blair.

Unfortunately the Colonel stepped down from command at the end of *Wing Commander III*, and now devotes his life to a small Wookie farm situated on some distant moon. It's here where we first find Blair, shacked up inside a grotty inn, sipping on a glass of alien ale. Maniac, sent to reassign the commander, manages to convince the Colonel of the Confederation's situation, and within minutes Blair is suited up and ready to return to battle with the unknown once more.

MAKING MOVIES

Wing Commander IV is, in essence, just a natural progression from *Wing Commander III*. The style of the game is very similar, mixing rendered and full-motion video cutscenes with epic space battles, although Origin has honed each area of the game to make this a more refined interactive experience. Take the FMV bits for example; in *Wing Commander III* they were admirable, but sometimes the images were grainy and the blue-screen backgrounds didn't always match the characters which were overlaid on top. As for the Kilrathi, they looked more like over-grown muppets than a vicious alien race. For *Wing Commander IV*, Origin were a little bit more ambitious, largely due to the staggering \$10 million budget given to the project.

This sort of cash meant that Origin no longer had to cut corners, and Chris Roberts could at last fulfil his dreams for the *Wing Commander* series. The virtual sets were therefore replaced by real-life sets, including life-size reproductions of a starship bridge and the gritty bar scene in which Blair is first found. Not only does this make the cutscenes all the more convincing, but the characters are no longer plagued by a fuzzy outline – because they were filmed on the background they blend in perfectly. The quality of footage is better too, because it was filmed on 35mm film as opposed to the original grainy video.

However, while the FMV may look better, it still serves the same purpose – to visualise the plot. While *Wing Commander IV* always starts



at the same place, player's make decisions through the adventure which effect the overall result of the game. It works on pretty much the same system incorporated by *Wing Commander III*, although the sequel gives the player a lot more decisions to make and therefore they have more freedom to determine what happens next.

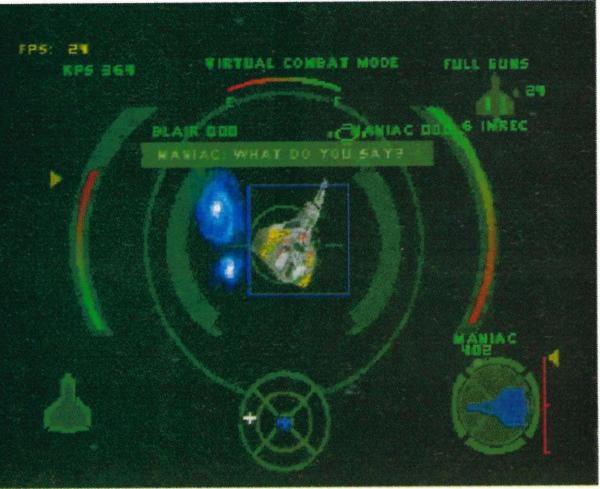
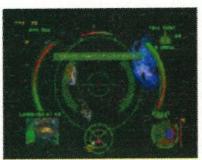
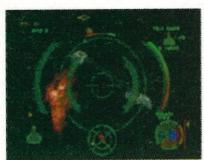
The direction of the story also depends on the player's performance in combat too. Obvious continual success will result in the most rewarding (and shortest) route to victory, while failing specific mission will take the plot off in another direction, and will give Blair a number of new challenges to face. Hopefully *Wing Commander IV* shouldn't be quite so linear as its predecessor then.

IT'S GOOD TO TALK
While the cutscenes tested the players ability to make decisions, the real test of skill is out in the cold vacuum of space where Blair and his fellow Confederates will have to take on the might of The Black Lance. After sitting through the mission briefing Blair jets off into space, often accompanied by a wingman who acts under direct orders from the player.

Thanks to the game's tweaked communication system there's more variety in the orders that can be issued, and with a little practice it's theoretically possible to engage the enemy from two angles – ordering the wingman to attack head-on while outflanking the enemy with your own ship, capturing them in a deadly cross-fire.

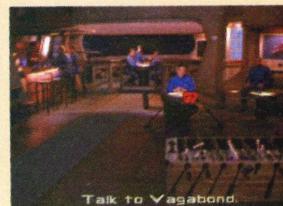
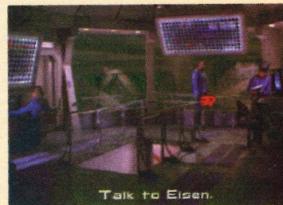
As well as greater interaction with your fellow pilots, *Wing Commander IV* introduces new craft to test pilot. Probably the most exciting ship on offer is the Black Lance Dragon-class fighter, a prototype ship that Blair manages to steal from the pirate band. Boasting technology well in advance of anything fielded by the Confederation, this is every pilot's true dream.

It's a complicated ship to fly though, and quite how Origin plans to squeeze all of the controls into one tiny joystick remains to be seen. The question of disc storage is an even bigger mystery though; the PC version of *Wing Commander IV* can be bought on six CDs – will the PlayStation game take up just as much space? Considering the first game took up four, this is going to be one monster sequel.



IT COST HOW MUCH?!

\$10 million is a staggering amount of money to spend developing a game, although it's plain to see that most of the budget was spent. Dispensing with the virtual sets as seen in *Wing Commander III*, Origin opted for real-life sets which proved both extremely expensive and time-consuming to build. The result was worth it as the FMV sequences are far more convincing as the characters match their surroundings perfectly. Of course, the all-star cast also helps to create a believable plot...



Solved

Nikki, Fargus and Sid rushed up a staircase and stood on a high balcony with power in hand and Pandemonium awaiting. Whilst here at PlayStation Plus we give you a comprehensive step by step guide to this fast 3D action/platform game, so comprehensive in fact that part 2 is to follow next month...

Pandemonium!

LEVEL 1 – SKULL FORTRESS

Begin by pushing the statue at the start of the level to reveal a Freeze Ray then continue to walk right to find a Fireball power-up and a Spit plant, collect both of these. Once again, walk to the right jumping on a couple of Goons as you come across them. You will reach a Spit Plant, bounce off the plant to reach the coins then walk towards the staircase of melons and climb. When you reach the last melon leap to the path at the upper right, remember to collect all Spit Plants and Fireball power-ups as you go. Continue towards the stone bridge which leads you to a waterfall, jump up the falls and walk through to hit checkpoint 1.



Now move forward to the archway which has three small ledges next to it, jump from ledge to ledge bouncing from the Ratbats to collect the coins, then return to the right and go through the archway. Drop down to the Spit Plant and then drop again to another ledge with a green coin and jump across to the next ledge (if you miss this you will have to go all the way back round). Now slide down the big green hill and run into the elevator which will take you up to the top. Once at the top you will find a key, take this to open the gate then run to the right and jump over the archway and across the bridges, once you reach the last bridge, drop off the ledge and hug the wall, you will hopefully have landed on a ledge with a key and by taking this will reveal a bridge, when you have crossed the bridge, jump to the right over some small ledges, the last ledge is in



front of the Skull Fortress. Now jump into the skull and collecting all of the coins as you go. You will now reach checkpoint 2.

Take the key which will make the stone move to the right, then take a second key and run to the left under the skull teeth as they move, reaching the far left you should then return to the right and jump up the teeth to the bridge. Now leap right, bouncing off the two Ratbats and you will come to a ledge, drop to the lower bridge, walk to the right and fall down the passage, then drop down a second chute and walk across the bridge at the end. Now you can jump the gap and if you walk to the



right you will arrive in an area with a lot of ledges, some of them are moving, run to the right here and jump a level then keep going until you reach a tunnel – do not jump down past the four coins to the lower level! Now return to the far left, once you take the key you will start the ledge moving, bounce off the Ratbats for more coins and then get back on the ledge until you get to the top, then jump to the next key, move to the left and past two Goons and jump right. You should now have landed on a ledge, move left and drop down onto a heart. Then finish the level by walking right and through the doors.

LEVEL 2 – HOLLOW STAIRWAY

Run up the stairway bouncing off the Ratbats as you go, on the way up you can jump up several Ratbats to an Ankh. Continue forward and once at the top you will find a key, face towards the left, jump into the key and run back down the stairway (a spiky wall will start moving behind you) jumping and collecting coins as you go. Now jump onto the steps at the bottom and

walk through the doors, you will be standing on a rising ledge, then crash through the glass to checkpoint 1.

Kill the first Spit Plant for a double coin and grab as many other coins as you can, you can save time by ignoring the other Spit Plants as when the double coin wears off you can go back and kill them for some red coins, the last plant has a Fireball. Drop to the right



of the plant into a hole and then wait for the ledge to collapse. You're now in a dark area, take all the coins that you can find and walk



to the right to zoom back up the wall. Kill the plant and take the final coin and then finish the level by walking to the right.

LEVEL 3 – DUNGEON TOWER

Jump over the flame and you'll find a Spider to the right of the fire and a trampoline. Hold the jump button down to leap high above the trampoline and collect the coins, then continue past another Spider and through the gate. Run to the top of the bridge (watch out for the Spider) and drop into a hole at the left of the lower trampoline, you should now fall into a small room. Blast the target with a fireball (you got this on you're way down) and grab as many coins as you can, keep blasting the target until it drops off the wall then run through the door and back to the trampoline. Bounce over the trampolines and walk to the right, using the trampolines to collect the coins – but watch out for

the flames. Keep moving to the right and you will find an elevator, take the heart and get in the elevator which will take you up to checkpoint 1.

Move forward to find a green gem which shoots a fireball, jump the fireball and over the gem, now use the trampoline to get to the higher path, grabbing the coins, and drop back to the lower path. Now jump for the three coins above a gap, then run to the right again and take the heart. You should now come across some red spikes, if you are playing Nikki, jump between the spikes and use a double jump, if you are Fargus then bounce over the spikes using the trampolines. Carry on forward until you reach three ledges with Walkapedes, drop off

the edge of the third ledge and walk through the door. Bounce off the trampolines to collect all the coins, then leave the room. The ledge in front of you has spikes sliding up and down so run across the ledge when the spikes are down and bounce off the trampoline to collect three circles of coins. Now run straight ahead, past some fireball-shooting crystals, taking your time to jump to each ledge in front of you (if you're Nikki it is safer to use a double jump rather than the trampoline to get the circles of coins), walk past the crystal and into the elevator to go straight to checkpoint 2.

Here you have a choice of two paths, decide for yourself which one to take, but the official guide suggests that you jump onto the

higher path. Walk forward until you come to a hole, jump into the hole and you'll pop out of a blue dome, collect the key inside and a platform will take you to a ledge, grab all of the coins and jump across the ledge onto the roof of the tower, run along the roof and when you reach the top drop down inside the tower. Now run down the spiral ramp, collecting the special heart at the end then jump over the ledge and through the door, run to the left and take the lower path, make two big jumps through the door into the tower and run forwards, don't stop because the ledges collapse as you step on them, then drop down to the bottom ledge and take the key walking to the central exit.



LEVEL 4 – LOST CAVES

Step on the two Fire Blossoms (make sure you avoid the pink bubbles), then jump down three ledges and push the pink stalacities to the left so that you can take the purple coin. Run to the right avoiding the boulders and slide down the green slope, grab the Shrink Ray power-up by jumping from the left to the Ratbat. Now run to the right and jump up the ledges across the space with the falling boulder then drop to the lower ledge and down to the bridge, now go to the right and shoot the Stalag Dude, if you can't shoot him do a small jump and run under him when he's in the air. Carry on forward, stopping at the left of the boulder then shoot the Stalag Dude before running to the right. Shoot the second Stalag Dude and run to the right, straight past six boulders, bounce off the Ratbats to collect the coins and grab the key, taking this makes two coin circles appear. Now run left and push the wall which will allow you to drop into the web room. Jump onto the pink ledge which floats upwards and jump down to the left of the boulder then quickly turn to shoot the Stalag Dude, shoot the Spider and go to the right to drop

through the bridge to get to Checkpoint 1.

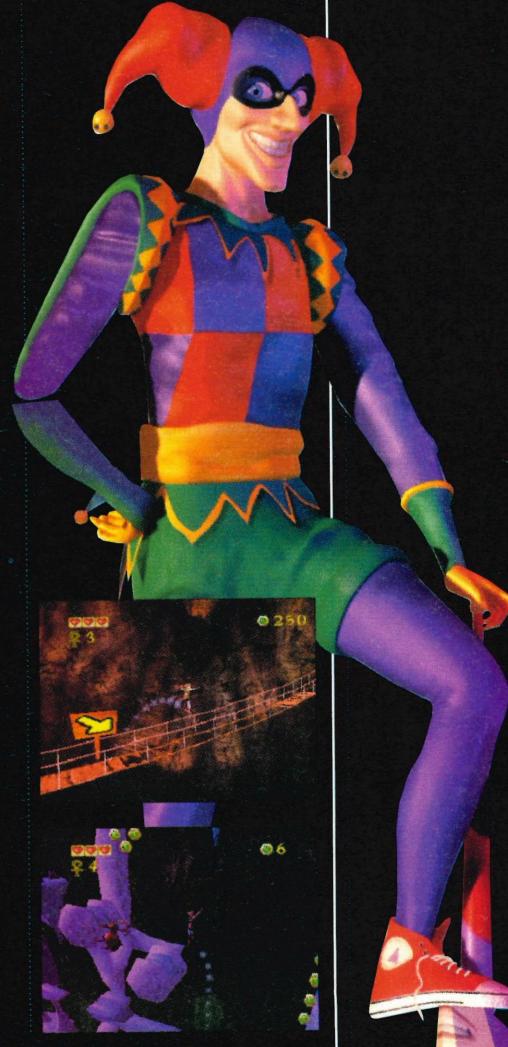
Go down the green slope and jump from the end, steering to the right to grab the key in the air, continue sliding. To grab the double coin, slow down and position yourself under them to allow you to jump up. Now jump onto the ledge above the stalacities bearing to the right shooting the two Stalag Dudes and the Spider. Go to the right and bounce off the Ratbat then drop to the ground. Now you can bear to the right again reaching another slope, walk onto this to grab the coins then return to the right and jump off the circling Spider for more coins. Bounce off the two Ratbats and return to the left, jumping along the web, go to the far side of the web to get the Freeze Ray power-up. Jump to the ledge above and move forward until you reach an area where you can drop down, but stay on the higher path and walk across the bridge then drop down, go right and jump into the purple hole to Checkpoint 2.

Run forward killing two Fire Blossoms as you go, go into the geyser and by holding the jump button down jump into two more geysers and take the coins. Get into the third geyser, killing the

Blossom and steer to the left jumping up the geyser to the next ledge, after killing the Blossom jump off the geyser and steer to the right, grabbing the coins as you fall. Now go left into the geyser and left again into another geyser. Move onto a hexagonal ledge and right into another geyser, jumping to the ledge above. Now jump to the highest hexagonal ledge and onto the solid ledge on the left, then you can jump along the frozen slide. Grab all the coins and jump right and across the ledges, drop to the ledge below the third Ratbat and go to the right, then jump over the wall to hit Checkpoint 3.

Kill the Blossoms and continue to the right towards three ledges with smashing boulders. Wait on the first ledge for the boulders to smash then run to the right and jump on the far left side of the second ledge. Now jump to the third ledge (if you grab the Shield power-up which will make you invulnerable for 10 seconds). Jump right onto the hex ledge and onto the high path, then along the small ledges and through the tunnel, when you reach the top collect as many coins as possible and run left out of the room. Drop to the path below,

cross the bridges to the right and walk into the exit.



LEVEL 5 – FUNGUS GROTTO

Go down the hill and onto the higher path, following the path slide onto a giant purple mushroom then bounce off the Ratbat to the right and onto a red mushroom, now jump right to another purple mushroom with a Spiky Snail, bounce off this snail and walk left, pouncing the Shrooms as you go. Bounce off the green trampoline and continue to the left, past the third red Fungus Bomb and here you'll meet a Fungus Guy, grab the Shrink Ray power-up, shrink him and then stamp on him. Now go to the right until you run through the stem of a large mushroom to enable

you to hit Checkpoint 1. Drop to the trampoline and continue through the magical gate, you are now a frog! Jump onto the white mushroom which stretches upwards, and along the mushrooms where you'll meet another Fungus Guy on the fourth Shroom. Jump off the last Shroom and land on the green trampoline, carry on to the left, past several small Shrooms leading you to a circle of coins and a heart. Now return to the right, past the green trampoline and jump onto the white mushroom, then go right through the mushroom stem to hit Checkpoint 2.



Drop to the green trampoline and over to the next one and take the key which opens a hole. Jump into this hole and follow the path, bounce off the green trampoline and onto the red mushroom, then bounce off the Ratbat and steer left to land on the mushroom which has a Spiky Snail. Drop to the green trampoline on the left and go between the Fungus Bombs taking the Heart and Ankh, return to the right and use the trampoline to get on the red mushroom, then jump to the purple mushroom and down onto the green trampoline, take the heart and go to the left. Take another heart at the end of the trail and return to the right all the way back to the trampoline, jump onto the purple mushroom and jump twice onto another purple mushroom, then drop to the path below, go



to the right and use the trampoline to reach the red mushroom, now drop to the path below to hit Checkpoint 3.

Jump over the Fungus Bombs and take the key from the Fungus Guy. Now jump left, bounce off the first Ratbat and then jump upward along the Ratbats, jumping off the last one to drop down to a load of coins. Go right, and through the magical gate which will transfer you to back into Nikki or Fargus and run into the tunnel to checkpoint 4.

Carry on along the trail and at the bottom you will find an arch with an Ankh and Gold rimmed heart, now walk to the exit.



LEVEL 6 – ACID POOLS

Start by going running to the right and jumping into the mushroom, this will shoot to the left and into another mushroom, continue right and you'll reach a bridge, jump into the hole in the middle. Now jump off the Fungus Guy and grab the key, go left and bounce off the bumper mushroom to reach the big mushroom on the right. Jump left to another bumper mushroom and bounce it above the wooden path on the right (you may have to jump from the path to the bumper and back up to the big mushroom again). Not forgetting the coins, go to the bridge and grab the key then walk along the bridge and take a

second key. Walk off the bridge and then to the left and underneath it, steering right as you fall. Now go right and smash through the mushrooms then go to the left on the path to collect more coins. Continue to walk left and down the bridge reaching three geysers above the acid pool, float in the geysers to collect more coins. Now float to the right and land on the big wooden path then walk



left and drop to the lower path. Now walk right to the bouncy mushrooms and bounce off them as follows: lower-right, lower-left, upper-right, centre, the centre mushroom sends you up to get more coins and a



key, now jump onto the higher path on the right and to the trio of Fungus Guys, go to the left and take two keys and go right to where the word *Throb* is spelt in coins, collect all of these to reach Checkpoint 1.

Drop from the door to a pyramid of geysers, jump above the highest one to get a key, now fly to the left and into the hole. Walk left again and drop onto the ledge, a breeze will blow you to the right, walking to

the left to slow yourself down. The breeze will push you into an elevator that takes you back to Checkpoint 1. Go up the geysers again and fly to the high path on the right, after collecting the Shield power-ups continue down the path, bounce over the Acid Pools using the Ratbats. Jump onto the floating mushroom in the big pool and it will move to the right, the exit is on the other side of the pool.



BOSS 1 – THE SHROOM LORD

Run to the right onto the ledge which floats up to the circular path surrounding the Shroom Lord. The Lord can either swipe at you with his staff or he can sneeze

out mushroom projectiles. You must keep moving so that he can't swipe you, when you first drop to the circular ledge run left to find the ready to launch

catapult with a fireball, jump into the air to trigger the torch and throw a fireball at the Lord. Run to the right and set off the second catapult and keep ruining

to the right to trigger the third (you will need to jump a gap to reach the third). The Shroom Lord should now be defeated and dissolve into acid.



LEVEL 7 – BURNING DESERT

Run forward, when you reach the skull and cross bones you have reached the bottom of the Desert, jump over the orange sand bearing to the right and bounce off two green trampolines and jump onto the ledge next to the boulder, grab the red coin and then jump on the boulder and run to make it roll, this will squash any Goons in the way, continue right to a second boulder and go underneath the ledge for a heart, roll this boulder as you did with the first, roll to the right and to a third boulder, now roll through the tunnel to squash some Goons and roll back to the left, jump from the boulder off two Buzzes and to a ledge, run to the right grabbing all the coins you can, jump across three

and run to the hill, you will bump into a speedy hedgehog that bounces you to incredible heights when you run into him, continue going right where a tornado will shoot you up to collect coins, jump the first roof you come across to the Buzz and the second temple roof and go right. The tornado will take you up to another Branky, jump over him and into the next tornado before he catches you, take the key on the ledge and drop left, now jump up the steps on the right and go down the long coin path to Checkpoint 1.

Jump off the end of the path and bear right to bounce off two Buzzes to land inside a hut, jump on the roof of the hut and bounce off the Buzzes

Jump onto the boulder and roll to the right, then use the tornado to soar left and right above the Buzzes, get the heart below the tornado and enter another cave for more hidden coins. Now fly from the tornado to the ledge on the right and move forward, drop to the ground then bounce up the green trampolines and off the fourth Buzz for more coins, go to the right and jump onto the path and over the Branky to grab a key. Get the Branky to run at the right side of the high ledge and then run left to the end of the path. When the Branky charges you can leap over him and run right on the lower path. Keep running and drop to a ledge, run right and drop to Checkpoint 2.

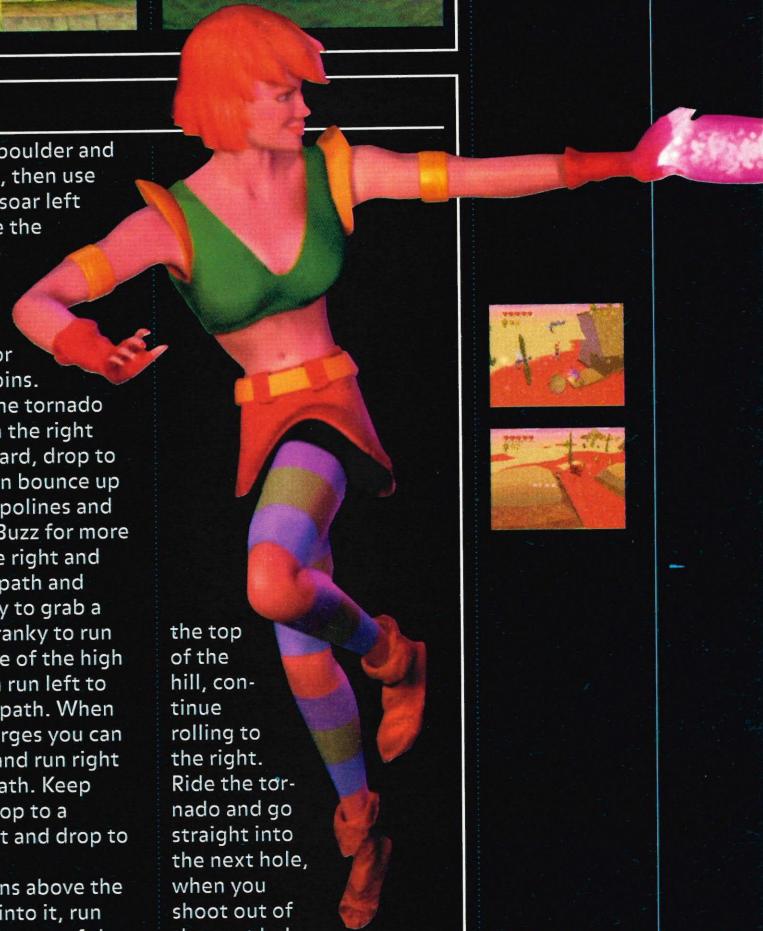
Grab the coins above the hole and drop into it, run left as you shoot out of the hole, walk right and jump over Dizzy, then go into the hole and out the other side. Jump left off the Buzz, and continue right, bounce off the Kanga Goon for coins and then go right and drop into the hole. Steer left as you come out of this hole and bounce left off the Buzz, grab the coins and jump left off another Buzz. Drop into the next hole and steer left as you come out the other end and bounce left along the Buzzes. There's a heart and a fireball above the next hole which whisk you to a boulder, ride this boulder to the right, it will roll to the left when you jump off so you have to jump back on it and steer right. When you reach



Buzzes to another ledge. Now drop to the ground and left into a tunnel for coins then come back and bounce up to the hole in the wall to reach Checkpoint 1.

Walk right to wake up the Branky, he will always charge at you, so avoid him if you do not have a weapon (collect the Fireball power-up) continue to the right

going upwards, jump off the final Buzz and drop down the long column of coins, there's an Ankh and a shield for grabs here too. Now go left onto the wooden framework, run right and bounce off the green trampolines above the orange sand (be ready for Dizzy) drop to the far left of the sand and go into the cave.



the top of the hill, continue rolling to the right. Ride the tornado and go straight into the next hole, when you shoot out of the next hole do not steer left; just fall back into the same hole. You should shoot out of the hole on the far right; steer left into the next hole to shoot out of a hole to get more coins and a heart, drop into the hole and steer right over the far right hole. Go right to two tornadoes and use them to get more coins, then go right from the right tornado to the exit.





LEVEL 8 – BRANKY WASTES

Drop to the first hut and then clean out the next two, go right and cross the bridge now walk about a third of the way across the next bridge and face to the left, wait until you see Dizzy appear and then run, Dizzy will spin from behind you and launch you into the air, steer hard to the left. Walk back to the bridge and wait for Dizzy, this time when he spins, steer to the right to land on the ledge. Jump through the tornado to the highest ledge and past a second tornado, now jump across to a ledge and bounce from the trampoline to a Buzz to the path, go down the first spiral and bear left, then drop straight down onto another trampoline, bounce off the highest Buzz to the bridge on the left. Now return to the right and bounce across the Buzzes, go down to the second spiral path, across two tornadoes to the right and then towards a giant spiral path. Slide down the ramp and drop into the hole at the end to Checkpoint 1.

Unfortunately when you land you will wake up a Branky, jump over him and go to the right (there are

some coins to the left) you can now lure the Branky into some Cactuses for you, but you have to keep going left then right to dodge the Branky. If you are Nikki you can double-jump the plants, but if you're Fargus you should tumble through them. Now drop for the end of the ledge and there's a heart on a ledge to the left, drop to the ground and wake up the Branky then jump over it and run right, up the skeleton. Now run down the other side and jump onto the skull, there are plenty of coins in this area. Then go back over the skeleton and through the magic gate, you are now a rhino and can plough through anything. Charge up the skeleton and drop in the gap for coins, jump back up through the hole going right and drop off the edge to hit Checkpoint 2.

Run left towards the wall and then turn right and go over the skeleton, take the key and run to the right again, through a tunnel for more coins, return left and jump into the tornado go left at the top for coins and then right and stomp a Goon. Now jump right and

up into the tornado and bear left. To get the lower coin circle you can bounce off the green trampoline and climb the tornado to reach the higher one. When you have got all four go right and into the tornado floating up to grab more coins. Now walk to the right and through the magic gate, returning to normal and to Checkpoint 3.

Bounce from the trampoline and to the ledges then up to the highest platform, collect the coins and go back to the ledge on the left. Now drop to the right and bounce off the Buzzes and jump along the path to the green trampoline,

bounce up to the ledge on the left and quickly across to the ledge on the right which moves, tilt it up on the left (by standing on the right) and grab the coins, then do the same for the other side, jump to the second tilting ledge and do the same, then jump onto the path and continue until you reach a hole. Jump into the hole and shoot out of another steering left and holding the jump button as you go. Use the second group of holes in a similar way which will eventually send you back to the first one, walk towards the exit.



LEVEL 9 – SPIDER FOREST

At the very start of this level a Blow Goon will shoot poison darts at you, kill him by pouncing him from above, then go right and onto the tree branch, stand here until it breaks then walk through the tree door and straight past the bear trap. Continue to the right. Enter the next tree, up to a bridge and pounce off the Buzz, go right and left for coins and then right into the door to go up to another

bridge, bouncing off the trampoline for coins. Now go to the door above the right side of the bridge, onto the next bridge for coins and a Fireball power-up. Go through the tree door and onto the lowest skinny branch, jump onto another skinny branch for a heart and then to a third branch onto a ledge. Enter the door, drop down to Checkpoint 1.

Now run across the trap

for coins and through a second trap, bouncing off the diagonal webs collecting more coins, walk right and grab the coin from the hut, go into a second hut and drop down. Kill the Spider that you are now next to and grab the Fireball power-up, bounce up the webs and off the highest web to a path on the right. Run forward through traps and huts and continue through a tree, now bounce up the webs and wooden ledges, when you get to the top, run right, onto the path killing Spiders, take the key. Now walk left and onto the web, bouncing for coins. Drop to the path, and by walking to the right drop off the edge, continue along the lower path killing more Spiders, bouncing off the webs and work your way to the top. Jump right, over the pointed tree trunk to reach Checkpoint 2.

Bounce off the webs getting coins and continue to

the right and up a tree, go across the bridges which are moving up and down then go right, kill the Buzz and run to the door. Jump onto the swinging platform then jump right into the next door. Now walk onto the bridge, walk left and drop off to collect some coins then use the web to



bounce back. Walk right and jump from the end of the bridge to a swinging platform, jump across two more to reach the path. Now run to the right, watching out for the rolling logs when you're past the second trap which you need to jump over. Continue up the path to the exit.



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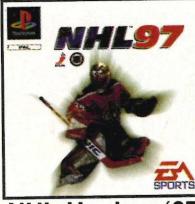
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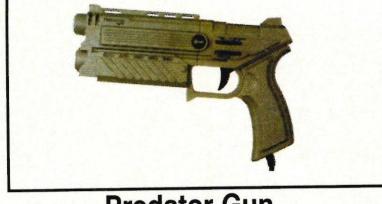
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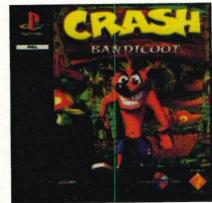
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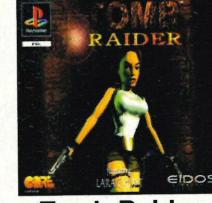
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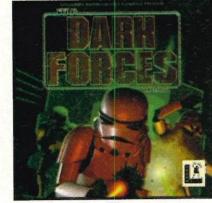
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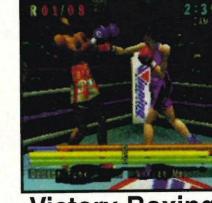
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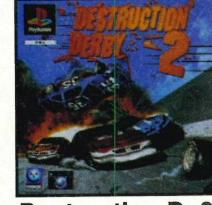
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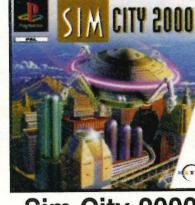
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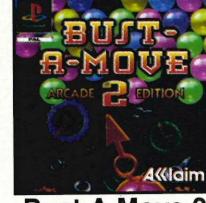
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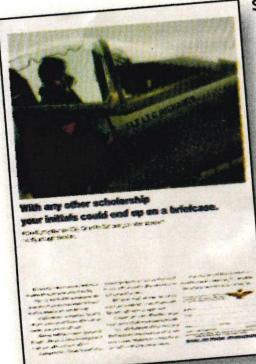




More Than
Just a Game...

Virtual reality. An experience. A way of life. Everywhere you look adverts proclaim that such-and-such a game is "just like being there". So is it? Really? **Can you learn to drive using Ridge Racer?** Are the Army more likely to consider you as officer material if you've completed **Command & Conquer?** We challenged five leading lights of the games industry to drop the marketing bluster and tell us just how '**realistic**' games **really are**. But why believe what the games industry people say? If you really want to know if being good at **Gunship** is going to get you into the RAF, the people you should ask is the RAF themselves. So we did. We called on folk like the FA, the Army and McLaren. Is gaming ability going to help you become a **footballer, soldier** or the next **David Coulthard?** Read, digest, enjoy... but **don't give up the day job.**

just a game?



So, should you mention your gamesplaying ability when you go for your interview at the careers office? Is being good at games likely to help you in the workplace? Richard Eddy at Codemasters can see the logic in the argument. "There is potential to say 'yes' there," he says. "Playing shoot-em-ups helps you become confident in your hand-eye co-ordination and reaction speed. It also teaches you how to logically plan your actions within a high speed environment. There are a lot of jobs where such skills would be useful." Eddy points to adventure games as "educating your thought processes and teaching you rules of deduction." Football management games, meanwhile, teach you how to plan and use a budget. A



Gunship

ROYAL AIR FORCE CAREERS SERVICE

"Aptitude is the most important thing we look for in a potential pilot. Hand-eye co-ordination certainly comes into it. As part of the training there is a certain amount of work on flight simulators, practising how to deal with major faults and things like that. To be honest, I wouldn't have thought that experience of video games would be of much practical use to someone who wanted to become an RAF pilot. As well as hand-eye co-ordination, there are foot and throttle movements and other things that you don't have on the video game."



"I wouldn't have thought that experience of video games would be of much use to someone who wanted to become an RAF pilot." The RAF Careers Service



starting point for a career in accountancy, perhaps?

Morven Sloan at Sony is less convinced: "I don't really think games have any practical use in real life. I suppose you could argue that the basketball games, the American football and ice hockey games give you a grasp of the sports' rules. By playing them on the computer it might encourage you to go out and try them in real life." Is skill at games going to help inform a career choice? "Games are just escapism. If they get people interested in things in real life then great, but I suppose you have to be careful. If a football game makes someone want to play football then would a fighting game encourage them to go out and kick the shit out of people?"

Steven Hey at Ocean takes an even more cynical approach: "I honestly don't believe that skill in any game is going to help you get a job. Our Quality Assurance manager Frank Parkinson says that being good at video games doesn't even necessari-



(TOP LEFT)
CODEMASTERS'
RICHARD EDDY.
(LEFT)
STEPHEN HEY
FROM OCEAN.
(BOTTOM LEFT)
VIRGIN'S DOUG
JOHNS.

ly mean you're going to be good at testing them. So if gaming ability doesn't even guarantee you'll be good as a playtester, I think using PlayStation skills to become an Army Major or astronaut is pushing it a little."

But surely there must be some practical application of video gaming? There must be some types of game that help you acquire real world skills? There must be some job that

games give you a bit of a head start in?

FLIGHT OF FANCY

Flight simulators. Don't pilots do some of their training on computer simulations anyway? Surely skill and experience of PlayStation flight sims will stand you in good stead. Morven at Sony is the most unconvinced of our interviewees. "Pilots do get tested on flight sims," she confirms, "and some of the flight sims that are available are fairly advanced. It might help you get your foot in the door, but I doubt whether your ability to play a game would be considered by employers in the real world. It gets you up and running, I suppose. If you're good on flight sims and they test you on one, they might help you that way."



Doug Johns at Virgin is more encouraging. "We did a game called *Flight Unlimited* on the PC," he says, "and that was so realistic that in the States they did a deal where trainee pilots could log their playing time as actual flying time. You could get a VR helmet with the game, and because it was pure flight simulation, it taught you a lot about where you should look. Things like looking to the horizons when you're banking. You don't look straight ahead when you're banking a plane, you look to the side to keep an eye on where you're going. *Flight Unlimited* also taught you how to use the rudders, which is an important part of

flying. We also have a sequel coming, *Flight Combat*. With most flight sim shoot-em-ups you can shoot an enemy plane, see another one to the side of you and pull back hard on the stick to turn your plane round. In a real plane you'd try to avoid moves like that which would put about 7Gs of atmospheric pressure on you. In circumstances like that you're supposed to use the rudders to turn the plane round. *Flight Unlimited* and *Flight Combat* teach that."

Steven Hey has some information that is both encourag-



You've got a basic understanding of what goes on inside the cockpit. You get to learn what all the dials mean and how they translate to your view." So experience of flight sims would help you get your pilot's licence? "I think playing flight sims



ACCORDING TO THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF MOTORING, BEING GOOD AT GAMES DOESN'T REALLY HELP YOU OUT ON THE ROAD. AFTER ALL, WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU RAN A RED LIGHT JUST TO BEAT THE DEVIL CAR?

Formula 1

MCLAREN CARS

"Playing racing games isn't exactly the most direct route into motor racing. I can see the similarities in that speed of reaction and quick thinking are important, but beyond that... I can't see how a computer game could, for example, enhance your spatial awareness, which is something that's very important when driving a race car."



would give you a head start over someone who had just read a few books about flying."

DRIVING AMBITION

If flight sims teach you some of the basics of flight, do driving games teach you how to drive? Our panel respond with a firm 'no'. Steve Leigh at Gremlin points out that "they're all very arcadey. I don't think driving games help you drive for real. I hope not, anyway. I'm rubbish at them. *Hardcore 4x4* is very



you switch between the different modes – four-wheel drive, rear-wheel and front-wheel – you will notice the difference in handling. The car handles very realistically."

Exactly like a real car? "The problem is that without having a hydraulics system giving you the sensation of left and right, you tend to lose it a bit. That's what you tend to miss playing on a computer."

You couldn't expect to play *Screamer 2* then jump into your Ford Cortina and hare off down the street at seventy miles an hour. The practical application of games is probably restricted to flight sims and maybe a few racing games, things like *Indy Car 2* and *F1GP 2* which get into the technical aspects of the cars, changing air foils and so on. You could learn a little bit, but really they're not that technically accurate."

Could you learn things that are of use in go-karting? "With *F1GP 2* you could

"Being good at driving games doesn't give you a head start in learning to drive. It's nothing, like being out on the road." BSM

ing and a little worrying. "There's a couple of people at developers D.I.D. who reckon they could fly a real plane based on their experience of flight sims. In the advent of all the flight crew being wiped out on your plane to Majorca, maybe you'd know enough to be able to take over the controls." I wouldn't bank on it. At least not without looking to the horizons.

Richard Eddy shares Hey's view. "A lot of flight sims are so true to life that you can play on them then go to a flying school and not be dropped in at the deep end."

realistic, but it's nothing like real driving."

Eddy can see some value in racing games: "Driving games might teach you things like taking corners, but in real life you aren't going to be racing your car at high speed along a big stretch of bendy motorway."

Virgin are one of the companies that are striving towards ever more realistic driving games. "We do a lot of racing games," Doug Johns confirms. "With *Screamer 2* we put a lot of work into how the car handles. You can play using a steering wheel and if



Ridge Racer

BRITISH SCHOOL OF MOTORING



"Being good at driving games doesn't give you a head start in learning to drive. Playing computer games would help with hand-eye co-ordination, but it's nothing at all like being out on the road. Driving is really all about awareness and the manual skills involved with changing gears and all the rest of it. Being good at driving games might help a bit, but not in any really tangible way."



probably learn about racing lines, which might be of help. The problem is you can learn where to position the car to take a corner, but when it comes to doing it for real you'll probably bottle out and mess it up. A lot of games teach you little snippets of stuff, but going out and doing it for real is a very different thing."

Steven Hey thinks that "it would be great if you could pass your driving test on the basis of having played *Ridge Racer*." However, he does feel that there is an important point to make about the fact that you can't. The lack of practical application of video games skills is part of the games' appeal. "One of the key concepts of video games," he asserts, "is they give you something you can't get in the real world. The

ARMY
OFFICER
BE THE BEST

just a game?



"Would being skilled at tactical video games be beneficial to a career in the Army Forces? No."

The ever-honest Army.

games that are the most successful are the ones that do add a dimension that you can't get in real life. As soon as we start putting video games on our CVs things might change, but I can't see that happening. I can't see games being of practical use at all. And there's nowt wrong with that."

FIGHTING TALK

So can games teach you to become a better fighter? Do they teach you military skills? Morven at Sony: "When we launched *Tekken 2* we used Prince Naseem. He was there to demonstrate that *Tekken 2* is a great martial arts game, and if it can get you into martial arts and encourage you to fight back in a positive way without using violence, then that's the sort of thing we're looking for games to do. Kids really like sports sims. I think they look at things like that and think they can help them when playing sport."

What about using games to train you for a career in the military? "As far as *Command & Conquer* and *Red Alert* go," says Johns, "certainly they teach you a bit about tactics, but I think if you went down the local Army recruitment office and

Command & Conquer



ARMY CAREERS INFORMATION OFFICE

"Would being skilled at tactical video games be beneficial to a career in the Armed Forces? Well, no. The only thing that video games might help you with would be hand-eye co-ordination if you wanted to become a helicopter pilot. Being good at video games will not help you one iota if you want to join the Army."

I DON'T CARE
HOW GOOD AT
TEKKEN 2 YOU
ARE, I'D STILL
PUT MY
MONEY ON
THIS BLOKE IN
A FIGHT.



explained that you had a lot of experience with Mammoth Tanks and the Army of Nod, you probably wouldn't get in at all. They'd give you a strait jacket and a padded cell."

Can games teach you to be a better person? "There are a few games that have morals. They try to teach you to be ecologically friendly and stuff like that. By and large those games are all about gunning down hordes of people, though, which misses the point really. I don't understand why people make 'environmental shoot-em-ups'. It's stupid."

Bruno Waterfield is a spokesman for Campaign Against Militarism, an organisation that opposed the Gulf War and has strong links with the Revolutionary Communist Party. Where does he stand on the issue of military games. "We don't mind those games at all. We're totally opposed to any form



Tekken 2

BRITISH JU-JITSU ASSOCIATION

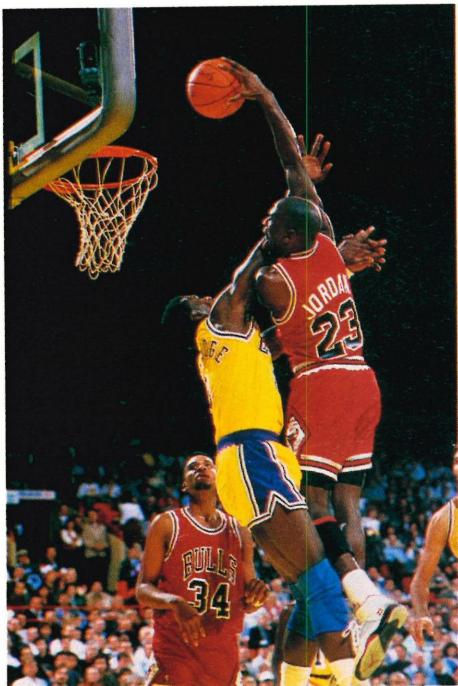
"I've been doing ju-jitsu myself for 27 years and I can't see any way in which video games have affected the sport. I don't think more people are taking it up because of the success of martial arts video games, and I can't see how playing the games would be of any use in learning the sport. Demonstration videos, yes. Books, yes. Video games, no."



of censorship. You can't blame war games for wars, the same way you can't blame violent films for violence. You know it's just a game. It's like

when you're very young and you have playground games of British against Germans. There was no political interpretation to it, it was just a way of identifying the two teams. You didn't mind being a German. You knew it was just a game."

So can games bring out the worst in people. Virgin's American office recently ran an 'experiment' on the Internet. Doug Johns takes up the story: "We set up a game called *Subspace*. It was like a giant version of *Asteroids* but the ships had cloaking devices and stuff like that. People would ring in and there would be a whole load of people playing against each other. It was supposed to



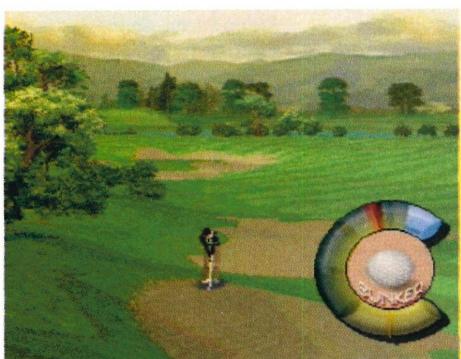
ACCORDING TO GREMLIN'S STEVE LEIGH, FOOTBALL GAMES CAN HELP IN A MANAGERIAL WAY, BUT NOT ACTUALLY OUT ON THE PITCH. DAMN.

be every man for himself but we noticed that groups of people were joining forces. If you were playing on your own you'd often discover ten ships de-cloaking right next to you before kicking the shit out of you. At one point there was a big feud going on between a gang of British players and a German gang." British against Germans again? Typical.

OK, so if games don't teach you how to be a soldier, do they at least teach you how to fight? Steve Leigh: "If it was down the pub on a Saturday night and there was a fight between Jimmy Hardnut, a 40 year old Sheffield bloke, and some kid who played *Tekken* for hours on end, my money would be on Jimmy Hardnut each and every time."

SPORTING CHANCE

It was beginning to seem as if flight sims were the only games of any semi-practical use. But wait just a minute... what about sports games. More particularly, what



Actua Soccer FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



"I don't know how you would judge whether playing a video game helps you when playing football for real. I wouldn't have thought it would help at all. Are football video game players more or less likely to participate in the sport? I don't know. There are 1.5 million footballers in this country and that figure hasn't really fluctuated in recent years, so the emergence of video games hasn't provided a noticeable effect."



nis at all. I didn't have a clue about the game until early 1994 when we were developing the first Sampras game on the Megadrive. I now understand tennis, I've played tennis and I'm an avid fan of the Wimbledon tournament. *Sampras Tennis* introduced me to a sport that I now really enjoy. You get to learn the actual rules of the sport. I found playing our game to be one of the best ways to understand the rules and the tactics of the sport."

What about football? Leigh again: "With *Actua Soccer* the individual players all have their own stats, so any budding Terry Venables out there can place a player in the most advantageous position and use the best possible formation depending on the stats. Factors like that are implemented to an even greater extent in the wholly management-based football games." So would it benefit a struggling manager to spend time playing a management game? "Absolutely. It might help Graeme Souness to learn not to shout at the ref all the time." Hmmm. "I do

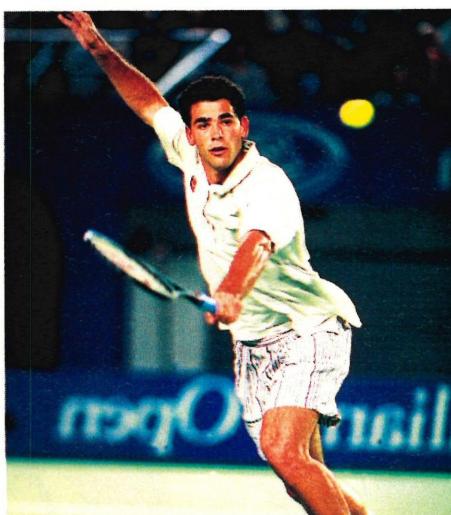
"A game won't help improve your swing, but it does demonstrate the effects of different clubs."

about golf? Isn't it true that they have computer 'driving ranges' at golf centres. Somewhere for people to get to grips with a given course regardless of the weather or amount of daylight. Does PlayStation golf compare?

"With the *Actua* sports games we have tried to make them as realistic as possible," says Gremlin's Leigh. "Half the battle in golf is selecting the right club and making sure you play the right shot.

In *Actua Golf* all the different effects are in there, so if you play with an iron it lofts the ball more which means the wind has more effect. A wood keeps the ball lower, so the wind has less effect. The game helps with things like choosing the right club and thinking through the hole. Obviously it doesn't help you with the more physical side of golf. A video game won't help you improve your swing, but it does demonstrate the effects of different types of club and different weather conditions. The physics now are very advanced and programmers take a lot of time making sure games accurately replicate the way that factors like weather and club choice affect each shot."

There are other sports where video games help you grasp the basics. "Here's a true story," begins Richard Eddy. "I'd never played ten-





think it would be useful for a football managers to tinker about on a management game a bit. As long as the stats are accurate and detailed, the game should replicate things accurately and give them an opportunity to try out new formations. Yeah. Why not?"

FINAL VERDICT

What about genres like adventure games? Do they have practical applications in the outside world? Not according to Johns: "I don't think that adventure games teach anything that would be of use in a job, except perhaps improving your abilities

COULD PLAYING TOMB RAIDER GIVE THE AVID ARCHAEOLOGIST AN INSIGHT TO SOME OF THE PERILS THEY MIGHT ENCOUNTER? I DOUBT IT.

at logic and working out puzzles. But that's about as far as it would go." Richard Eddy is interested in the benefits of gaming as a group activity: "Multi-player games like *Micro Machines* enable you to hone interpersonal skills. You can team up and work with other people, not just against them." Aren't video games the enemy of interpersonal skills, something to lock yourself away from the world with? "I think video games are moving away from the culture of someone sitting alone in their bedroom. The PlayStation in particular is thought of as a party machine and there



International Track and Field

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"From our point of view we wouldn't see there as being a correlation between people who play athletics video games and people who go out and take part in athletics. If people were affected like that they'd be going out and murdering people after playing games in which you kill. Playing athletics video games won't help you when you're running. You're going from something [the game] which is at best purely mental to something [the sport] which is highly physical. It may well be that there is no correlation between the two at all."



"The aim of all games should be to have fun, anything that comes off that is a bi-product."

OCEAN'S STEVEN HEY RECKONS VIDEO GAMES IMPROVE HAND-EYE CO-ORDINATION. SURELY THAT'S A GOOD THING?



own products."

The words of summary come from Hey: "I read something recently that said that the kids of today

have more hand-eye co-ordination than previous generations. They put that down to video games. Hand-eye co-ordination is a skill that is useful in all areas, it's something that you just take for granted. There's also logic and puzzle solving skills to be gained from, say, *Tomb Raider*, but at the end of the day it's a secondary thing. The primary aim of all video games should be to have fun. Anything that comes off that is a bi-product."

Doug Johns adds: "Flight sims teach you a bit about how things work, but I think if you were to apply for a job and tell them that you're good at a particular game, they'll just think you're completely mad."

The End Bit

Well it seems that flight sims have practical uses, some sports games (particularly golf) teach you more than just the basic rules, which in many cases is useful in itself. On the other hand, you won't pass your driving test by playing *Ridge Racer*, no matter how good at it you are.

But have we missed anything? Have you found a practical use for any particular game? Has your gaming experience helped you in your workplace or leisure pursuit? If so, we want to hear from you. Write to: **How Games Helped Me, PlayStation Plus, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU. Cheers.**

are more multi-player games coming out all the time. With multi-player games, particularly team games, it develops a level of communication within a competitive environment. That's a good thing."

So what game is of the most practical benefit? Steven Hey chooses *Doom*. A bizarre selection, but he has his reasons. "The most obvious way in which games benefit you is that they are a good way to take out the pressure of everyday aggravation – especially in network mode. That's a practical application of video games."

Anything else? "Certain games improve hand-eye co-ordination, motor skills, logic and puzzle solving skills. Mind you, some games probably do the opposite and actually dissolve logic skills!"

So should companies have one day a year when all its employees bond by playing video games. Eddy thinks that it would be a very worthwhile exercise. But what game would be best for bonding? "I'd suggest *Micro Machines* because I'm an unashamed plunger of my

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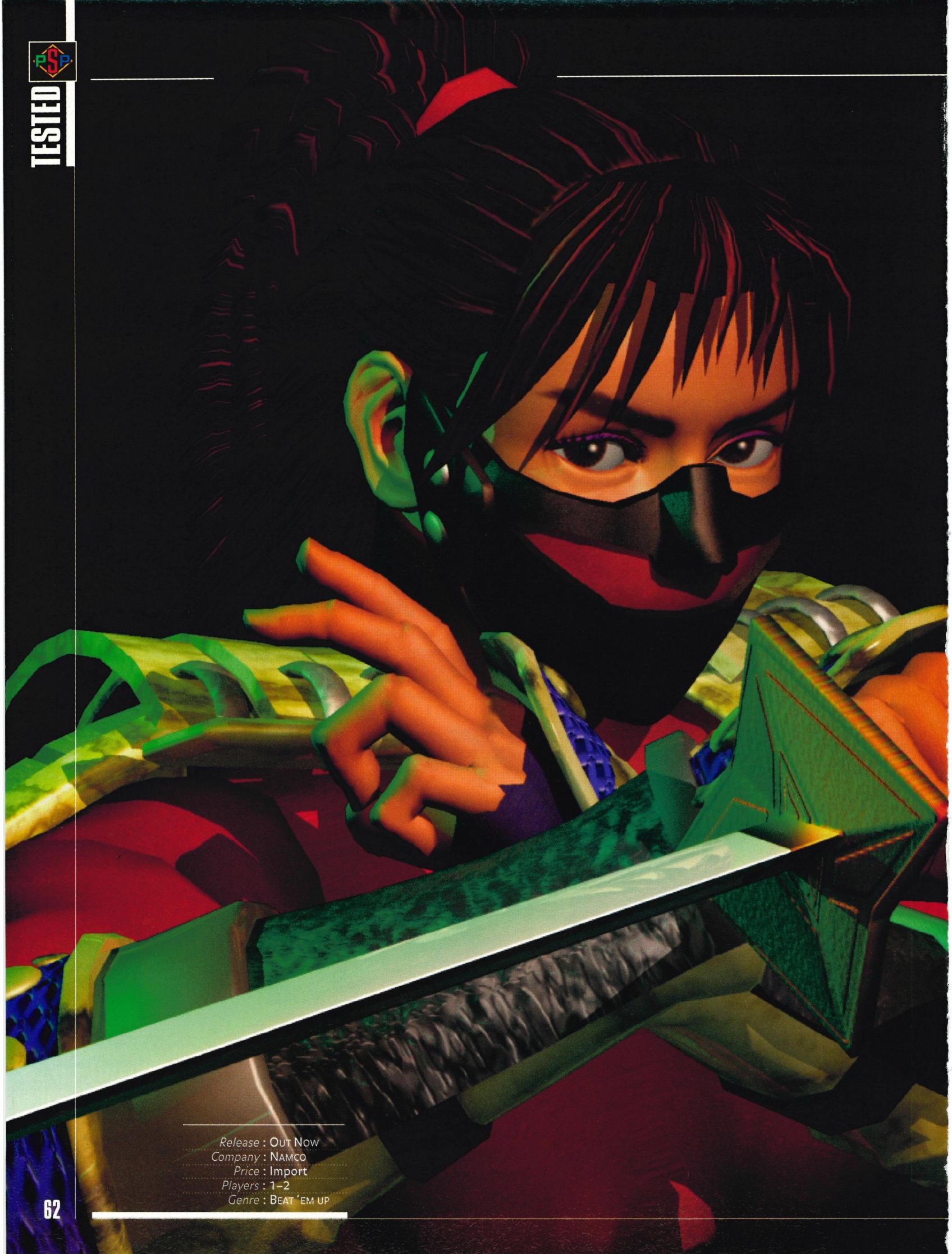
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Release : Out Now

Company : NAMCO

Price : Import

Players : 1-2

Genre : BEAT 'EM UP

Soul Edge



Playing a new Namco beat 'em up is an unparalleled video gaming experience. Just as Capcom are justly regarded as the champions of the 2D arena, Namco have the same unassailable claim within the 3D fighting game spectrum. Many companies have tried to emulate the success of the *Tekken* series, but, for the most part, their efforts lack the multi-layered appeal of the Namco titles. Consider the likes of *Iron and Blood*, *Toshinden*, *Criticom*, and *Zero Divide*. Each is a playable enough game, boasting features different from the rest, but none of them have the essential playability which separates Namco from the rest of the pack. Each game features the requisite special moves and a fistful of punches, kicks and throws, but once you've mastered them there is very little room for growth. *Tekken II*, on the other hand, and despite the sluggish PAL conversion, allows sublime control over its many characters. Another advantage Namco beat 'em ups have over the plentiful competition is their sheer versatility. Virtually every fighting game released since *Tekken* has emulated its content to an extent. Each features a 'Story Mode' wherein the scenario unfolds in between bouts, or there'll be an 'Arcade Mode' which concentrates on the action, and is invariably followed by the 'Versus Mode' for two players. Namco, on the other hand, offer practice modes which allow the player to perfect the huge combination possibilities their titles offer, and also offer 'Survival' modes to hone skills further, and a wealth of hidden possibilities that only become apparent after prolonged play. *Tekken II* was previously thought to be the pinnacle



of beat 'em up design, as every aspect of the game could be tailored yet the basic playability was immediate. But what if weapons were added to the Namco engine? What possibilities could that open up? The *Soul Edge* coin-op answered such questions, but even that cannot compare to the sheer beauty of Namco's PlayStation conversion...

GETTING STARTED

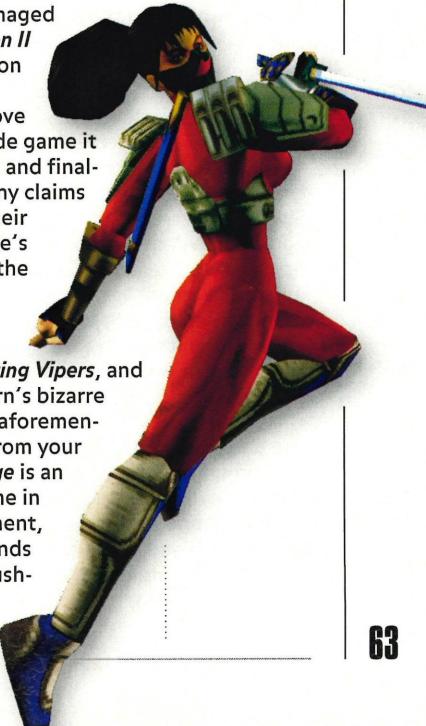
Within the film market, it's a commonly held belief that sequels are invariably weaker than the original. Only a relatively tiny list comprising the *Indiana Jones* follow-ups, *Aliens* and *Terminator II* can be separated from a hall of shame that includes countless *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* films, and the likes of *Highlander II*, *Return to Oz*, and (spit) *Grease II* – yet with video games, sequels usually out-point the original in every department. Tweaked graphics, the removal of annoying faults,



THE SPECIAL MOVES AVAILABLE ARE VISUALLY STUNNING, WITH EACH CHARACTER PULLING OFF GRAVITY-DEFYING THROWS AND IMPALING TECHNIQUES.

and bits and bobs bolted on to the main engine are all integral parts of a sequel, and *Soul Edge* is most certainly the culmination of years of beat 'em up expertise on Namco's part. In one game, the Japanese R&D team have managed to usurp *Tekken II* from its position as premier pugilist, improve upon the arcade game it is based upon, and finally lay to rest any claims

Sega had of their Saturn machine's superiority in the fighting game arena. Forget *Virtua Fighter II*, forget *Fighting Vipers*, and wipe the Saturn's bizarre pairing of the aforementioned titles from your mind, *Soul Edge* is an incredible game in every department, and if this sounds like overtly-gushing praise, let me explain





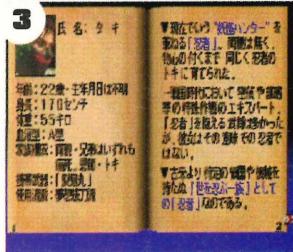
why it is so good. Every aspect of *Soul Edge* is polished until it shines. Granted this can be said of all Namco's major releases (and I'm ignoring *Galaxian 3* here), but getting to grips with *Soul Edge* is just the beginning. As with the *Tekken* series, *Soul Edge* offers the familiar scenario of selecting a hero from the nine available, and battling it out against a series of CPU-controlled opponents who get more intelligent as the game progresses. Combinations of the Dpad and the face buttons allow for a number of offensive moves, blocks and evasive measures, and each character is equipped with a pair of simple but effective throws, and a ready-made combo which is effected by depressing three buttons at once. Nothing new there, then. However, the main addition to *Soul Edge* over its



rivals is the inclusion of weaponry to the basic beat 'em up premise.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Soul Edge's plot surrounds the quest for a mystical weapon known as the titular blade. Legend has it that whoever possesses the blade is endowed with enhanced fighting skills, and the current owner of the weapon is a pirate called Cervantes. In true Namco style, a convoluted plot gives a detailed background to the reasons each of the nine entrants pursues the blade, and each account is



AS THE CHARACTERS GRUNT AND GROAN THEIR WAY THROUGH THE THREE BOUTS, THE SPRITES FACES ARE ANIMATED IN TIME WITH THE SAMPLED EFFECTS.

punctuated by the actions of Cervantes who bumps off more relatives than Patsy Kensit shags pop stars. As such, in addition to becoming the proud possessor of the mystical *Soul Edge* weapon, the nine entrants also want to exact revenge on Cervantes who conveniently acts as the final boss in the game. Similarly, Cervantes travels have taken him across the world in his seemingly aimless quest to slay as many people's relatives as possible, and as such the multiple nationalities of the entrants allows Namco to try their hand at a variety of weapon possibilities for each different character.

While Cervantes is armed with a pirates cutlass and the *Soul Edge* of the title, the nine would-be owners come equipped with a variety of swords, knife designs, axes, and even a pair of nunchaku – which should raise a few eyebrows with the censors considering even the second *Brady Bunch* movie had a nunchaku sequence cut out!

The addition of weaponry to a basically sound

game engine could have gone either way, perhaps over complicating matters, but after a handful of games using the swords, pike staffs and the like becomes second nature, and some of the moves available have been cleverly built around them. The basic joypad moves are based around a hard blow which leaves the player slightly exposed, a lighter blow, a kick, and a blocking motion. While mastery over these will allow Namco novices to get to grips with the game, the control system offers multiple layers of control nuances which reveal exquisite control as the player gets better. For example, having pieced together a series of hard and soft blows, pressing the square and X buttons together will instigate a visually stunning throw, while X and the triangle button pulls off another special move – the first, faltering step towards hidden

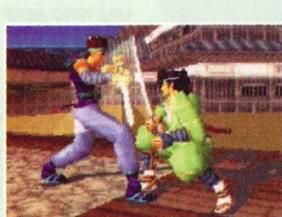
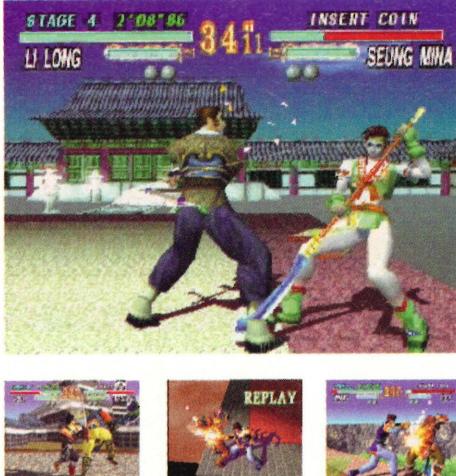
THE WATER MARGIN

Much has been made of Sega's AM divisions, and their graphical techniques in the *Virtua Fighter* series. In the VF arcade games, the players fight on boats which pass under bridges, and punch each other while the floor moves. However – and this is a big however – none of these features made it into the Saturn versions. *Soul Edge*, on the other hand, is the first PlayStation game to tackle such problems, and Namco have handled such problems with aplomb. As the player progresses through the ranks, several levels take place on floating rafts which bob and tilt as the fight continues. The amount of data needed to do this is considerable, and it is to Namco's credit that the game doesn't slow down to compensate. Similarly, if the player manages to knock their opponent out of the ring during one of the water-based rounds, they disappear under the water with a satisfying splash. Another example of Namco's detail is the character faces. Although the *Tekken 2* characters were well drawn and detailed, in *Soul Edge* the faces are now animated, and as the sampled speech and grunts are played, so the mouths move in sync with them.





AFTER THE BATTLE, THE LAST MOMENTS ARE REPLAYED FROM A NUMBER OF ANGLES WITH THE CAM-ERA FINALLY SWOOPING IN FOR A HEROIC CLOSE UP OF THE VICTOR.



SWORD PLAY

Soul Edge is a perfect video game replica of old martial arts films, with the swords clanging as they hit each other, and plenty of opportunities for gravity-defying leaps and moves. If the two combatants move in close, their swords lock and both must push and pull the other in order to gain supremacy. Similarly, if two high moves make contact, the screen flares to indicate the power of both moves, and both player recoil under the impact. Timing is everything in *Soul Edge*, and skilled players will have learned that waiting until a sword swipe has come to an end before following through is an essential art, with small thrusts allowing for blinding displays of flair and multiple hits.

techniques. The beauty of the *Soul Edge* is, like the *Tekken* two, the discovery of the many moves each character can perform. *Soul Edge*'s nine heroes are capable of nearly forty moves apiece, from the simplistic Dpad and one button blows, to intricate combinations of punches, leg sweeps and kicks which pummel the opponent into the air and allow for bizarre juggling scenes as blow after blow is used to propel the victim towards the edge of the arena.

KEEP ON MOVING
While 'combo' moves are nothing new, no other game does them as well as *Soul Edge*. Even *Street Fighter Alpha 2*'s custom-based system can't compare to the fluidity of the moves, and the

forward to. The former, as the name suggests, are unstoppable and reduce energy whether the opponent is blocking or not. The latter are the *Soul Edge* equivalent to *Mortal Kombat*'s finishing moves, and should only be pulled off if the intended victim is low on energy. Basically, the Critical Edge moves are a chance to show off, and not only do they batter the victim senseless to win the round in style, but insult is added to the considerable injury caused as the CPU takes over to administer even more blows for added effect!

In an effort to keep *Soul Edge* fresh and also differentiate it from its *Tekken* stable mates, Namco have added a couple of extra ideas to the game. Whereas *Tekken* and



its sequel were set in a scrolling play area, *Soul Edge* borrows from the likes of *Zero Divide* and *Criticom* (why not, they borrowed enough from *Tekken*) and is set within a small arena. This allows for 'Ring Outs' wherein if the player steps out of the play area, the bout is ended earlier. The second major change, though, proves essential when attempting the Critical Edge moves. Beneath each character's energy bar at the top of the screen is a smaller bar. This is the 'Weapon Gauge' and indicates how much power the sword or whatever has remaining. The bar is reduced every time the player is forced to defend themselves from attack, and if fully depleted the player's weapon is knocked from their grasp leaving them to fight with their bare hands. Not only does this promote more attacking play from the player, it also adds to the skill the game demands, the the Weapon Bar is essential for pulling off the Critical Edge moves. These moves can only be pulled off if the bar is suitably full, and launch into an eight-hit attack. However, a risk of using the move is that it also depletes the Weapon Bar, and unless it is used to finish a foe it could result in the user ending the bout using only their hands!

LIFE ON THE EDGE

The majority of *Soul Edge* moves are lifted from the two coin-op updates of the game, and in the process Namco's PlayStation team have also managed to tighten up the game to make the home version better than the coin-op! The origi-

VOLGO HAS A STUNNING MOVE WHICH FIRST THROWS THE VICTIM TO THE FLOOR, AND THEN SEES HIM BEND OVER BACKWARDS AND SCUTTLE ACROSS THE EXPOSED BODY OF HIS FALLEN FOE — USING HIS KNIVES TO ADD FURTHER INJURY.





nal *Soul Edge* coin-op was released in February last year, and used Namco's System 11 board which meant that a conversion to the PlayStation would have been a fairly simple routine. However, as the code was prepared, the enhanced *Soul Edge II* appeared and the decision was taken to transfer this to the PlayStation, although further elements would be available. The main extensions are additions over the basic 'Arcade' and 'Time Attack' modes offered by the coin-op. Team Battle Mode is a free-for-all using several of the available characters in a winner stays on battle, while 'Versus' is the bog-standard dual-player mode where tallies are kept of who has won the most bouts. The 'Survival' mode pioneered by *Tekken II* is also present, allowing real hard nuts to take on all comers with just the one energy bar! The creme-de-la-creme, however,

is the 'Edge Master' mode. During the visit to Namco's Tokyo HQ, the team were particularly enthusiastic about this incredible new addition, and it's easy to see why. Having selected a character from those on offer, a story unfolds as the player travels the world culling those who stand between them and a final battle with Cervantes. The tale is spun through the pages of a book



WITH CERVANTES DEFEATED, THE MYSTICAL SOUL EDGES BLADE FIZZES WITH RELEASED ENERGY, AND FORMS INTO A SPECTRAL FIGURE WHO ACTS AS THE GAME'S FINAL FOE.

which gives details on the tasks ahead, and the player's progress is marked on a map in true adventurer style. The real beauty of the Edge Master mode is that it expands even further upon the fighting game basics. For example, every time the player defeats their opponent, they are given access to their weapon, thus allowing cross pollination of swords and nunchakus with characters not normally associated with them. This opens up further combo opportunities and adds even more moves for each different character, but throws up some nice skill-based features, too. For example, in order to defeat one character and steal their sword it may be necessary to beat them three times in succession without losing a single bout, while another will require a particular finishing tactic before they will relinquish their armament. In addition to adding even more

variety to the game, the Edge Master idea also gives the player the chance to really hone their new-found skills, and getting to Cervantes is set



Opinion Namco have really hit their PlayStation stride now, and *Soul Edge* is quite simply one of the greatest beat 'em ups of all time. Every aspect of it has been tinkered with and refined to add to the game's playability, and the immediacy of the action is extended as the many move possibilities come into play. Graphically, Namco have pulled out all the stops with more detail than ever before (included animated faces) and moving locations, and whereas the weapons could have spoiled the game, instead they take it to the next plane. Of course, all this is based on the NTSC code, but if the PAL code is 75% as fast as this then it will still be a winner.



to be a real test for even the greatest players.

PRAISE BE

The trouble with new Namco titles is that it is easy to run out of superlatives. I genuinely thought that *Tekken II* was one of the best games we'd see for the PlayStation, but the attention to detail and sheer playability of *Soul Edge* make it even better. Graphically, the game is stunning (see box), and the gameplay has been designed so that it has more layers than a Walls Vienetta. The use of the various weapons is superb and opens up new avenues for move possibilities, but it is the stunning 'Edge Master' mode that has won me over – with maddeningly

playable tasks which infuriate and inspire at the same time. Once again, Namco have come up with the goods, and following hot on the heels of *Rage Racer* and with the stunning *Time Crisis* hot on its heels, this could well be their year. *Soul Edge* starts off well with a digitised intro (but not to the detriment of the main game – others please note), mixes playability with stunning aesthetics, and has the depth to see it dragged out again and again for repeated play. You can't ask for much more than that really, can you?

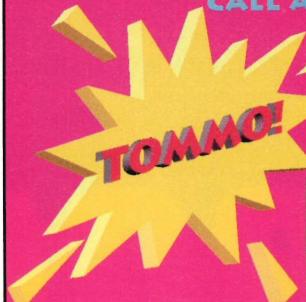
PSP RATING...

Graphics : 96
Animation : 93
Sound FX : 89
Music : 90
Lastability : 95
Playability : 94

94



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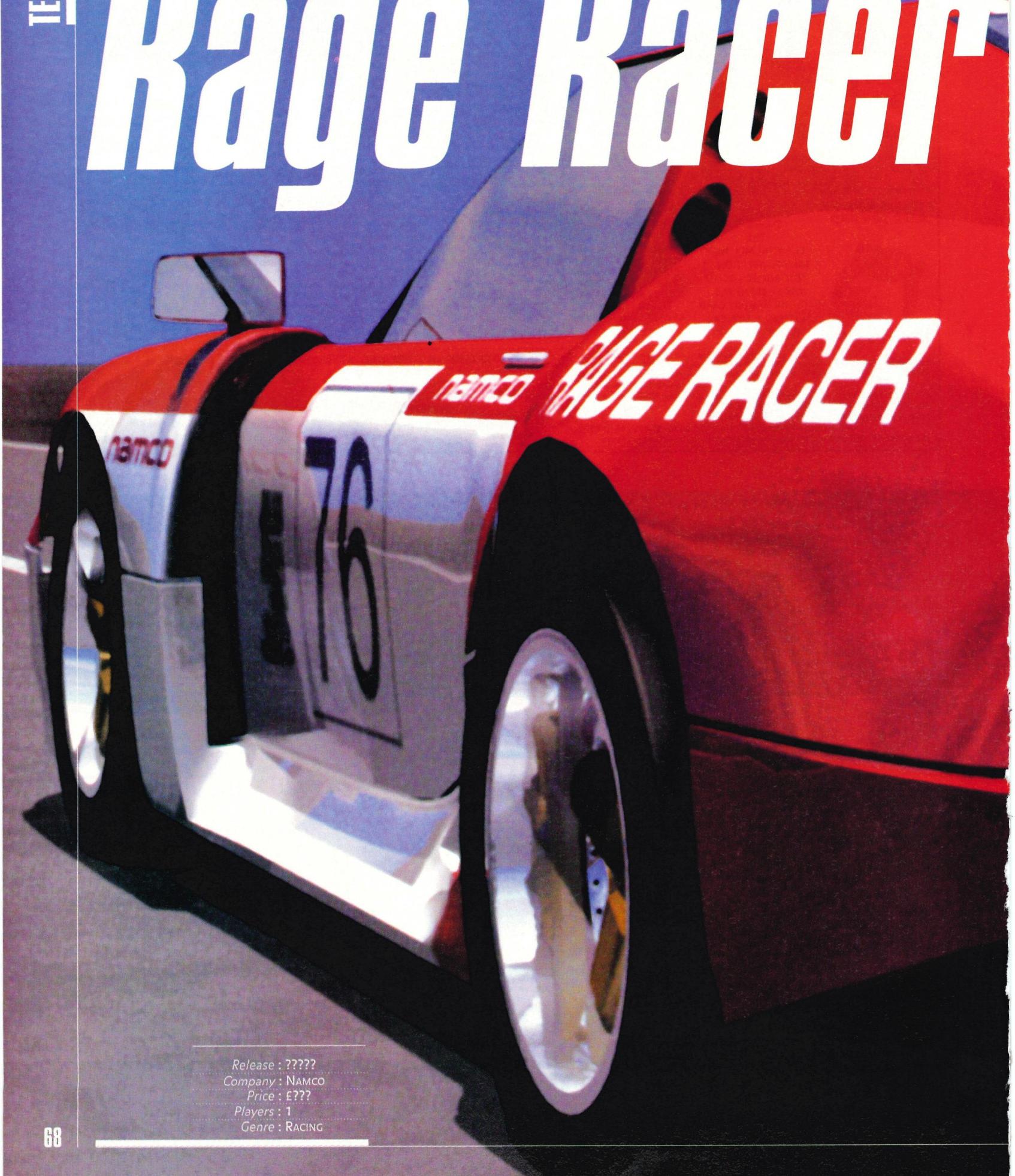
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Rage Racer



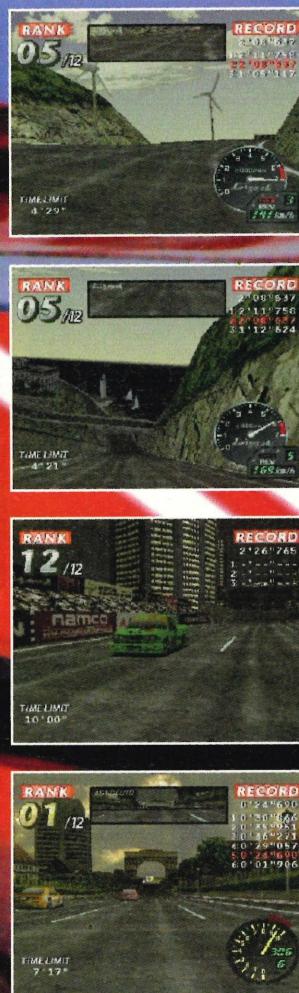
Release : ?????

Company : NAMCO

Price : £???

Players : 1

Genre : RACING



BURNING DOWN THE START/FINISH STRAIGHT OF THE EXTREME OVAL IN FIRST POSITION AT OVER 300 KPH. HEAVEN, I'M IN HEAVEN.

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Despite the speed at which you hurtle around the course, it's always possible to make out and appreciate the level of detail applied to the *Ridge Racer* scenery. Cafe fronts include open air seating, old fashioned flats look continental with shuttered windows, the blades of a windmill rotate. Drive past the sea front and you'll spot ancient Atlantis like ruins jutting out of the water, a passenger ferry appears later on, there are Mexican looking churches, a gigantic gushing waterfall, and you'll even find an Arch de Triumph along the start/finish straight. God alone knows where this course is supposed to be set, but who cares it looks wonderful.



When the PlayStation was first released, racing fans essentially had three games to choose between: *Destruction Derby*, *Wipeout* and *Ridge Racer*. Although there is no doubt that *Destruction Derby* hit upon a fun idea for a game, it was immediately obvious that the game suffered glitches and lacked long term appeal. *Ridge Racer* looked pretty hot, but like many other gamers I'd seen hundreds of *Out Run* clones and owning a new 32bit machine I wanted to see the next generation of game - something completely out of the ordinary. *Wipeout* was the one that took the market by surprise, standing out from the crowd and impressing the hell out of everyone with stunning, slick and pacey graphics, mind blowing music and a full on challenge. New life was breathed into the genre.

Despite this kind of competition, Namco stuck with their baby and released a tweaked up sequel. *Ridge Racer Revolution* added link up mode, more cars and tracks, and improved game-play with slightly less frustrating controls. Although the game was well received there was no doubt that this was a quick upgrade and not a major overhaul.

Since then both *Destruction Derby II* and *Wipeout 2097* have arrived on the scene, demonstrating exactly how a follow up should be handled, and making *Revolution* look like a cash in. Both are major improvements on their predecessors, posting new standards for other racers to live up to - tough acts for *Ridge Racer* to follow?

POLE POSITION

Right off the starting grid, *Ridge Racer* makes it very clear that this piece of software intends to take first place. The starting FMV sequence slaps you around the face shouting I'm a beautiful and fast bit of kit, play me now!.

Drum'n'Bass tunes pump out as ray traced, light sourced cars scream past the screen. Other cut sequences jump out at you and before any races have even begun you can feel the adrenaline surge.

It all feels like you're sitting in front of a top notch arcade machine until the options screen comes up and you start to get an inkling of the number of sleepless nights this game is likely to cause. Four tracks are included, but only three are shown to start with as access to the extra one requires you to win a few trophies. As before the circuits are constructed from variations on one course and ascend in level of difficulty.

Hold on, aren't we moving too fast here. What's the slant, the hook, the story so far? According to the sultry female who introduces the game, no one knows anything about the how the sport was invented, or indeed why competitors are called rage racers, perhaps its down to their driving style. We are informed that these chaps have

fetishes for burning rubber and apparently the deep roar exhaust notes titillate the base instincts. Forget the game background then; what we do know is that the setting for the racing is a city noted for tunnels and winding roads, which is surrounded by the sea and mountains. Sounds like just the place to take fast, expensive cars and drive them round like an absolute lunatic.

Either try and set new lap records in the time trial, or embark upon a grand prix. The later leaves out the idea of a series of ranked races or a season points table as in games such as *Formula One*, instead opting for stages of challengers where moving up levels requires a top three placing in each race. Eleven other challengers also have their sights set on the top spot, and race length is



ALL IN ALL THERE ARE AROUND TWELVE CARS TO CHOOSE FROM. BOTTOM OF THE RANGE IN PRICE AND PERFORMANCE IS THE MINI. MAKE IT RIGHT TO THE TOP AND GAIN ACCESS TO THE DEVIL CAR.

CHOICES, CHOICES.

Strapped for cash and unable to upgrade? Worry not. Test out clashing colour schemes, design a tasteless personal logo, have your name printed on your own Kev and Tracy sun blocking strip. Tinker till your hearts content and you'll grow attached to even the crappiest car. One of *Rage Racer*'s best assets is the inclusion of so many options to personalise what you drive. The result is that the game draws you further and further in, grabbing your attentions both on and off the track – not an easy task for games of this kind.



three laps unless using the short oval track, where you must chalk up six laps. Only one vehicle is within your price range at first, but many more will turn up in the car shop. While saving up cash for a new model, why not have a bash at customising your motor? Go for re-spraying the body work, including the go faster stripes, personalise the team name, design a new logo and fit various compounds of tyres. Surprisingly even though this game models itself of an arcade racer, there are more bells and whistles here than a troop of Morris Men at a rave.

Speaking of over powering music, Namco have thankfully decided to ditch the tinny and tacky sound tracks of parts one and two and have come up with top quality tunes ranging from intelligent Drum'n'Bass to full on

A REPLAY
MODE AUTO-
ACTIVATES
AFTER A TOP
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UAL CONTROL
OVER THE FILM
AS IT PLAYS
BACK YOUR
FINAL LAP.



ATTENTION TO DETAIL IS EVIDENT EVERYWHERE IN RAGE RACER.
CHECK OUT THE QUALITY OF THAT GOLDEN SUNSET!



pedal to the floor hardcore. The tracks all make you feel tense and on edge, making the experience all the more absorbing. Play for long enough in one sitting and they will probably become rather annoying, but then there are nine to choose from. Perhaps the addition of a few mellow numbers would have been advisable.

HAIR RAISING

Enough beating around the bush, how does *Rage Racer* look and play? First time out on the track and I guarantee you'll be amazed, not just by a few details like the passenger jet that takes off in the distance, but by the whole experience. Backgrounds are stunning, varied and feel realistic and solid. Buildings are exceptionally detailed and have very obvious architectural styles – residential, high rise, commercial and historic. The streets used as a track wind all over the place and are well textured, but the most noticeable improvement is the rate at which they climb or drop. Take these monster 1:1s climbs in the wrong gear, and your engine

will strain, losing vital speed. Hit them in the right gear, keep the revs up until the brow of the hill and your car will literally take off.

WipEout first introduced that feeling of being strapped to a run away roller coaster and now *Rage Racer* produces an equally white knuckled ride.

Personally I like the speed of a racer to be complemented by the ability to lose control at 200mph, plant the car into a good, solid crash barrier, and take pleasure in the resultant destruction.

Software houses apparently disagree with this mentality, perhaps because resetting the screen after a smash interrupts the flow of the game, or maybe they are worried by what the censors would have to say. Whatever the reason, there's no chance to crash 'n' burn in *Rage Racer*, the closest you get is small shunt 'n' dent.

For a racing game, in game sound effects are surprisingly varied. Each of the cars has a distinctive engine howl which gets more throaty after tuning, and on some you are able to pick out the separate whine of the gear box. Tyres

squeal and there are nasty crunching noises when you collide with other cars or pieces of scenery. Also included are small sections of commentary, warning when the competition is knocking on the door, offering encouragement, laughing when you take things too slow. Nothing here is revolutionary, but not much more can be added in the sound department of a racer.

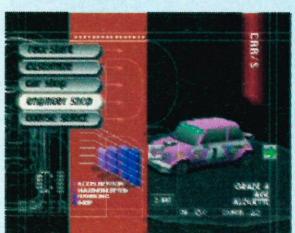
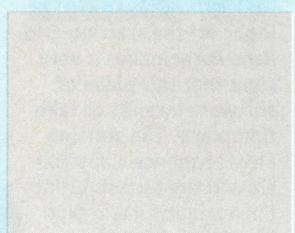
Getting the feel of the car and tracks is at first fairly easy, and before long the opposition starts disappearing in your rear view mirror. Overtaking is a real joy and its obvious that the programmers have spent a lot of time and effort getting the collision detection just right.

Many games still frustrate by having cars that look one size and act another. Neatly squeezing and weaving through small gaps between cars at very high speed is a trade mark of *Rage Racer*.

Taking the right line through bends and chicanes

METAMORPHOSIS

Each of the 12 vehicles available at the *Rage Racer* show room can be customised over five separate stages. Spending more and more money leads to the addition of a huge variety of spoilers, body panels, engines, wheels. These refits not only give noticeable improvements to acceleration, grip and top speed, they also make your car look absolutely awesome. To see all the possible variations will certainly take a great deal of time and effort as some of the prices are astronomical. For example the final stage of refitting some of the cars will set you back seven figure sums. Fortunately the prize money at the top levels is also outrageous.



is essential for a winning drive. When controlling one of the cheaper, slower cars this is not much of a problem, but get behind the wheel of an expensive supercharged model and things get a little more hairy. Keeping power slides under control, gentle use of the accelerator and avoiding over steer are all essential to master, and are often difficult to pull off when using the standard PlayStation controller. Loose grip on a tight turn whilst in first place and other drivers are quick to overtake even if you try plenty of blocking tactics. If you are lucky enough to own an analogue wheel you'll instantly get much more out of the game. The experience feels much more natural and as close control becomes easier, driving becomes more fluid.

NICE CURVES

Sensibly Namco have employed a fairly gentle learning curve, with plenty of inexperienced competitors in the bottom classes. Win these races to earn cash, buy better cars and spend even more on tuning them up – essential if you intend to keep up with the pack nearer the top classes. In earlier editions of this trilogy your opponents were unpredictable, swerving all over the place, moving up and down positions like yo-yos. *Rage Racer* drivers seem much more plausible, some look inexperienced and prove to be slow, easy meat; others are aggressive and determined, making overtaking difficult and they are always right up your arse when you make a mistake.

Under the high gloss bonnet of this game lurks a very special software engine. The



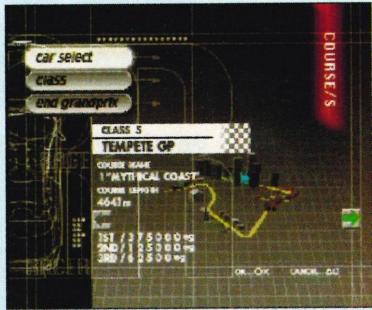
NO MATTER HOW MUCH IS DISPLAYED AT ANY ONE TIME, RAGE RACER STAYS SMOOTH AND FAST.

feeling of speed is outrageous, thrilling and frightening. Often you can't help yourself screaming as you hurtle towards a bend or rocket over the brow of a hill. No matter how crowded the track gets, *Rage Racer* never suffers any slow down or jerky animation, quite a feat when you see just how much detail is displayed at any one time. Unlike other games, scenery never suddenly pops up in the distance, the track itself, buildings, bridges, mountains all steadily stream towards you. Despite being so three dimensional, everything holds together very well, demonstrating how programmers are now really getting to grips with the PlayStation's capabilities.

All this care and attention by the programmers to the basics of the game really do make all the difference. Playing *Rage Racer* is an experience that screen shots alone simply can not convey. Although it never sets its self up as any kind of simulation, the game engine is so slick,

VARIETY'S THE SPICE OF LIFE

At first glance, *Rage Racer* appears to suffer from a lack of tracks, with just three to choose between. Keep winning and you'll discover the extra oval, which is designed for extreme speeds, and if you get bored with the standard four courses, there's always the mirror mode where you race the tracks in the opposite direction.



Opinion Tyre screaming, panel denting, pedal to the floor, balls out action. A game that picks you by the scruff of your neck and refuses to let go. A huge improvement on *Ridge Racer* and *Ridge Racer Revolution* in terms of graphics, playability and depth. There is only really one gripe to be made, and that's the lack of a link up mode. All in all though an arcade road racer that beats all the pretenders hands down. **JM**

you do get the feeling that this is as realistic as an arcade racer is likely to get.

Watching others play, you notice how people are forced to move controllers from left to right like they were using real steering wheels, or how some cock their heads when banking around a tight corner. However embarrassing this kind of behaviour might appear, it does demonstrate

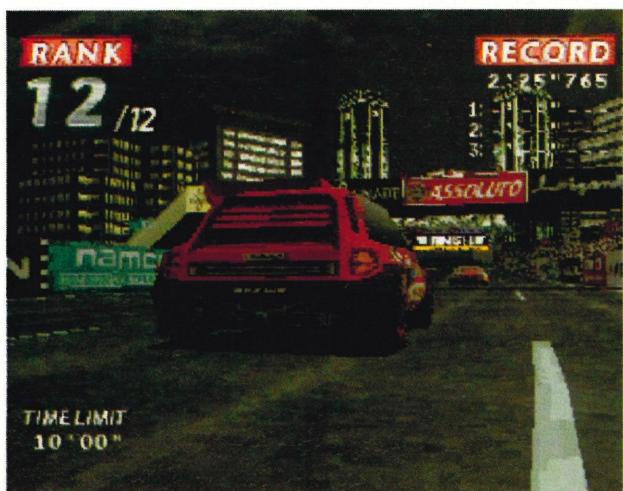
how most are unable to stop themselves from becoming totally emersed.

As mentioned earlier, I've always been a *WipEout* devotee not just because it's incredible to play, but because it's so different.

Now that Sony's machine has been in production for over a year, there seems to be less emphasis on the need to search out radically different concepts of games and instead appreciate even the most tired of themes so long as they're well executed, for example, *Street Fighter Alpha*. We've all seen this kind of game many times before, but in terms of playability and looks, *Rage Racer* breaks all the moulds, pushing everything to the limit. I'd recommend this game to anyone.



THE FMV SEQUENCES THAT INTRODUCE THE GAME ARE STARTLINGLY GOOD. DRUM 'N' BASS TUNES ARE THUMPED OUT AS RAY TRACED CARS FLASH PAST THE SCREEN.



EAT MY EXHAUST NOTE! A SUPERCHARGED RENAULT 5 LINES UP IN LAST POSITION ON THE STARTING GRID.



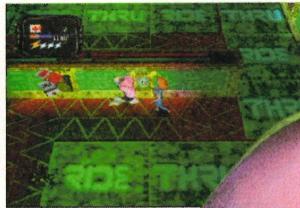
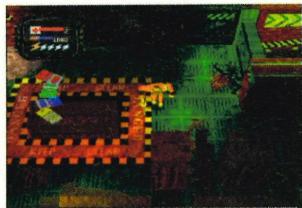
PSP RATING...

Graphics : 95
Animation : 90
Sound FX : 85
Music : 90
Lastability : 92
Playability : 95

93

Reloaded

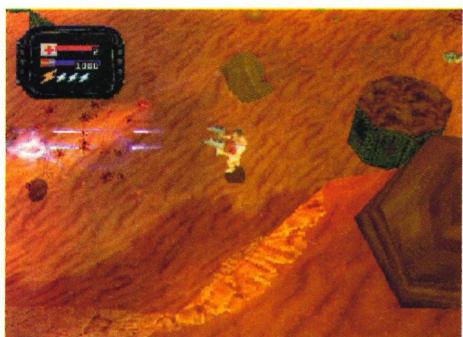
THE EFFECTIVE LIGHT-SOURCING OF THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED BUT IS NOW COUPLED WITH MORE SOLID, 3D LEVEL DESIGN.



movies and games have one thing in common and that's what we in these parts call Sequelitis. You have a commercial success — you make another one. Some developers have got it down to a fine art; how else do you think those Electronic Arts execs afford their penthouses? Last year, Gremlin found themselves with a respectable hit from an original concept, *Loaded*. The name of our review title, *Reloaded*, gives you a big clue to what they've done.

Loaded was an overhead viewed shoot 'em up using the scenery of six grimy anti-heroes blasting their way out of a 16-level interstellar maximum security prison set on a distant asteroid. The kind of place Michael Howard has nice dreams about. Their visitors, rather than waste time bringing in the odd bit of dope in their underpants, smuggled in an entire arsenal and the game was on. *Reloaded* jumps some time into the future, with four of

the original cast, Mamma, Bounca and Butch out for revenge on the loathsome mega creature who framed them, Cheb. Two of the originals have been given their marching orders Derek Wilton-style, and replaced by two new oddballs, The Consumer (a babe with a taste for human flesh) and the psycho nun Sister Magpie, and they presumably have their own vendettas against Cheb.



Release : Out Now

Company : GREMLIN

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-2

Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP

ONE OF THE MAIN IMPROVEMENTS OVER THE ORIGINAL ARE THE IMPROVED ENEMY IQS.

NOW IN 3D

Reloaded expands beyond *Loaded*'s uniform two dimensionality, by attempting to add tiers to some of the levels. Polygons are used as before to construct the walls, giving a solid effect through parallax, but this depth is utilised as a gameplay element. In the first two levels, terraces are used as vantage points by enemies to hurl rocks (though they are often out of sight, making boulder dodging a task best suited to Mystic Meg). The next level uses it better, as the player uses ramps to reach gun emplacements on higher levels. It takes time to get used to which bullets are on the same level as yourself, as they cast no shadow. Things get more ambitious with levels with criss-crossing gantries creating a two-tier maze, and occasionally players get to walk along the walls themselves. There are also pseudo 3D effects, like the falling crystal shards in the Monastery of Sound.



The game scenario shares much in common with the original. The action still, by and large, involves killing huge numbers of enemies across a series of scrolling, top-down viewed levels.

STAR TREK

Reloaded has freed itself from the rather limiting concept of a single environment, and takes the fight across six planets, each split into sub-areas. Each sub-area is so graphically diverse as to make the distinction between planets irrelevant apart from the game plot itself, which unravels sparsely as the game loads between levels. But, looks-wise at least, this freedom has its benefits as the original game suffered from rather drab repetitive

graphics which were pretty much obligatory given the setting. The new settings are altogether brighter and more interesting to look at, with a good deal more imagination given to background scenery. With more leeway, the graphic artists have let themselves run riot in some places, including an art gallery level with dozens of comic exhibits.

The resolution and detail have improved somewhat as well, although this is not initially apparent. It's the later levels that show off a smoother and more refined game engine, although *Reloaded* has not made the kind of technological leap that distinguishes early PlayStation releases from the likes of Core's *Tomb Raider*. Both the player sprite and the enemies



THE GRAPHICS NOW SPORT A LEVEL OF DETAIL WHICH LOADED COULD ONLY DREAM OF.

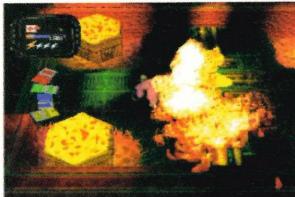


are a good deal less blocky, and there is a greater variety of enemy types. The enemy forces in *Loaded* were pretty much cannon fodder, exhibiting hardly any intelligence at all and just wearing the player down by the sheer weight of numbers.

Gremlin have seen better of this and reduced their numbers and the pace of the game accordingly. To balance the lesser number of targets, you get some sort of AI in your foes, who will dodge and retreat, and occasionally use objects against you — the rock pushers in the opening desert canyon level are a good example.

CONTROL FREAKS

For a game that relies on reflexes, the controls have to be good, and *Reloaded* has a good feel to it. Beyond



shooting, walking and running, there is the option to strafe or stand ground and fire in rotation. Any player wishing to go the distance will have to incorporate these, which means holding down a lot of buttons for long sessions of play. Players have a custom weapon and a personalised special weapon (effectively a smart bomb). There doesn't seem to be the same potential to power up the standard weapon as there was in *Loaded* — a feature employed very early in the previous game.

GREMLIN HAVE RETAINED THE GORY DEATHS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERIES, WITH THE NEW WEAPONS BEING EVERY BIT AS DEVASTATING AS THE OLD — WITH THE SMART BOMBS DESERVING A SPECIAL MENTION.

Opinion *Reloaded* is a sequel by numbers. It actually looks better than the original and rectifies a few of the first game's problems, and has more characters. However, the gameplay is still rather pedestrian, and while the blasting action is enhanced with the addition of more intelligent foes, frustration lurks around every corners thanks to hazards which are nigh-on impossible to predict. The puzzle element of the game is neat, but made redundant as Gremlin obviously thought we're all dim and dish out massive clues all the time. If you liked the original (which we didn't) this is marginally better

GS

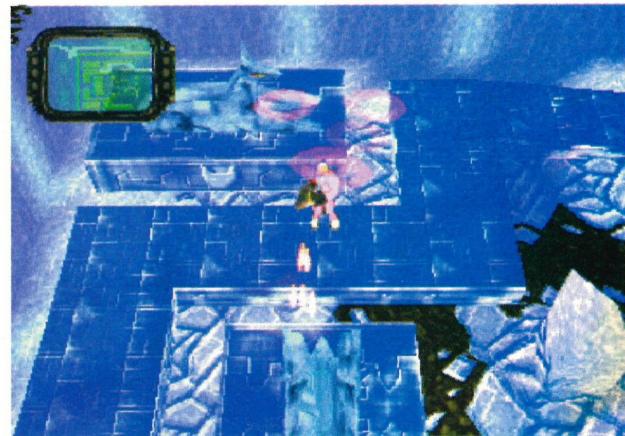
CHANGING TIMES

As previously, there's a two-player mode. I can see the point to this, but in execution it doesn't make the game that much more fun to play, as you might expect. Gamers can be an anti-social lot, and the idea of cooperative play isn't half as appealing as competitive play. Which is the kind of play which is not available. Perhaps in a bid to chafe things a little, there's a new Friendly Fire option in the two-player mode, no longer giving your opposite number automatic protection from your

shots. Should cause some arguments, but shouldn't make it that much more appealing. The main disincentive is always having to head in the same direction. Gremlin should devote their energy to creating a split-screen option, or some sort of Deathmatch arena. There is some sop to a competitive nature with the score tallies, which compare the performance of both players on a level, and awards the goodies accordingly.



WHILE RELOADED TRIES TO NEW IDEAS WITH ITS INTRICATE BACKDROPS, IT'S NICE TO SEE THAT OLD VIDEO GAME CLICHES SUCH AS ICE LEVELS HAVEN'T BEEN FORGOTTEN.



THE ROCKY LOCATIONS ARE MADE HARDER WITH THE ADDITION OF FALLING ROCKS. THESE DROP FROM THE TOP OF THE SCREEN, AND THEIR APPEARANCE CANNOT BE PREDICTED MAKING THE GAME OCCASIONALLY VERY FRUSTRATING.

THE TASK UPON YOU
The most severe criticism of *Loaded* was its repetition caused by lack of variety in later levels, and the drawn out nature of some of these, with players required to backtrack across maps in search of level keys. The designers have tried to make *Reloaded* more interesting in this respect by introducing tentative puzzle elements and varying the objectives on nearly every mission. Their imagination stretches to a foundry level where sections of the floor are superheated by fires and the player must find a corresponding switch to activate a sprinkler. In another, the player acts as bait for an enemy who has

the power to shatter crystal, using its fire to free shards which are used to operate pressure pads. Looked at harshly, these are still little more complex than key-lock puzzles, with no real lateral thinking required. However, Gremlin have obviously worried about the solutions being too obscure as hints in the level briefings and from in-game info tiles make everything bloody obvious. There's still an element of the worst of *Loaded* on some levels, which seem to involve nothing more than negotiating large mazes. One saving grace, Gremlin have kindly provided a miniature map with a trace showing areas that you have already been to whilst playing *Loaded*.

CHANGING TIMES
Reloaded is in a slightly awkward situation coming after a year of some great advancements in 32bit game standards. *Resident Evil* and *Tomb Raider* have reset the standards in 3D worlds. Last year it was a retro gaming concept (its roots lie in *Robotron* and *Smash TV*) in stunning up-to-date garb. Although the garb has been updated, the overall impression is that it all looks a little dated. Also, although everyone (us excepted, it must be said) was making love to *Loaded* when it appeared, it turned out to be pretty monotonous in its later stages, merely getting bigger rather than better. *Reloaded* isn't as wearying —



the levels are small and manageable. It's also not as hard, as some unfair aspects of the game structure are ironed out in favour of the player. Strangely, no one has produced a *Loaded* clone apart perhaps from Gremlin themselves with this retread. I would say that anyone who loved the original *Loaded* should be fairly happy with *Reloaded* which is, in effect, a bit more of the same, but just a bit better.



PSP RATING...

Graphics : 77
Animation : 70
Sound FX : 78
Music : 79
Lastability : 69
Playability : 77

73

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TOSHINDEN MAKES IT BACK ONTO OUR SCREENS FOR A THIRD TIME, WITH MANY OF THE ORIGINAL CHARACTERS STILL WITH STARING ROLES.

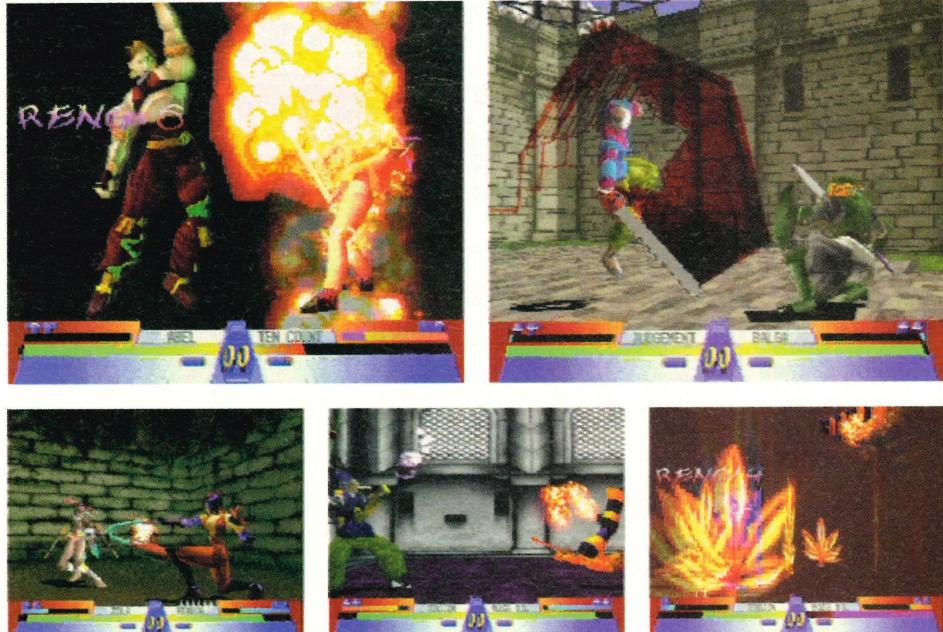
Battle Arena Toshinden 3

The Production of fighting games, particularly using three dimensional sprites, appears to have gone into overdrive at the moment, with versions of one game updated rapidly in response to competition. Witness the long term battle between *Battle Arena Toshinden* and *Tekken*. The former was on the shelves first, but didn't stay top of the pile for long, quickly replaced by the latter which has had a reputation of delivering more of a punch. With a history that goes back to the introduction of the PlayStation, these two have been standing toe to toe trading punches, and who knows they may still be at it into the next century. It's interesting that the market actually reflects the genre, but is all this good for us?

In the latest round of one-upmanship, *Battle Arena Toshinden 3* has just rolled off the conveyor belt in import form, boasting all-new sub bosses, heavier attacks, the possibility of stringing more combination moves together, a new slant on the fighting arena, and a group of contestants from the original that have grown a year older! While Takara, the software company responsible for all three versions, will undoubtedly tell you there was room for the redevelopment of old characters, part three surely begs the question: 'do we need more of the same'. With *Tekken 3* nearing completion surely both companies risk boring game players, unwittingly encouraging customers to check out some of the fresher productions such as *Soul Edge*.

OUT WITH THE OLD
Ten of the old characters might have made it into *Battle Arena Toshinden 3*, but major changes have also been made. Most noticeable is the way fighting takes place within an enclosed arena, in

Release : Out Now
Company : TAKARA
Price : £19.99
Players : 1-2
Genre : BEAT 'EM UP



AS WITH OTHER VERSIONS, BIG, POWERFUL MOVES ARE THE ORDER OF THE DAY. FORGET SKILL AND TIMING.

the style of *Fighting Vipers*. This means you can smash your foe against walls or slap them into the ceiling like a pancake. If thinking quickly enough, it is also possible to be thrown and use the wall as a springboard for another counter attack.

Another big difference is the addition of sub-bosses. Complete the game in single player mode using one character and you gain access to their alter ego. Sho and Able act as final stage guardians

WHO'S WHO?

This time around, ten characters have been kept from previous editions, with four characters making their first appearance. In response to *Tekken 2*, each of these 14 fighters now has an alter ego which can be accessed by completing the game in one player mode using the relevant player. Unfortunately these sub-bosses differ only slightly from the originals, and offer only a handful of extra moves. Here's the full run down.



NAME: EIJI SHINJO
HEIGHT: 175CM
WEIGHT: 63KG
AGE: 23
BLOOD TYPE: A
NATIONALITY: JAPANESE



A compromise between all out speed and strength, Eiji relies on his spinning sword play to win bouts. A bit of a goodie goodie, clean cut type, with a sonic the hedgehog hair cut, he fails to deliver excitement and doesn't really have many attacks that make you cringe.

Alter ego: its Leon the swashbuckling pirate. Deeper voice, a tasty cod piece, but essentially the same character.

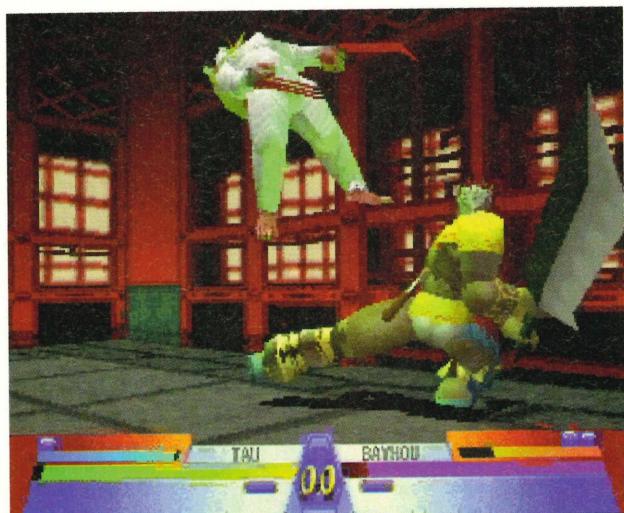


NAME: KAYIN AMOH
HEIGHT: 178CM
WEIGHT: 64KG
AGE: 24
BLOOD TYPE: AB
NATIONALITY: ENGLISH



A top class all rounder who is fast and able to put plenty of combinations together. Kayin has a useful overhead throw, is at home with multiple kicks and can hold his own when it comes to sword play. Also likes to show off his dancing skills.

Alter ego: Without question the most amusing character is Ten Count. This boy is the carbon copy of Michael Jackson, moon walking and grunting.



COLOURFUL AND DRAMATIC AND THERE'S EVEN THE OPTION TO PLAY WITH MICHAEL JACKSON!



AMONGST THE CHANGES MADE IN THIS UPDATE IS THE ADDITION OF WALLS AND A CEILING TO THE PLAY AREA. RING OUTS ARE A THING OF THE PAST, BUT IT IS NOW POSSIBLE TO SLAM OPPONENTS HEAVILY INTO SCENERY.

and there is also a secret demonic character to discover, bringing the total number of actual controllable contestants to a whopping 31.

In addition to all the modes of attacks provided before, each personality is now able to detonate a special weapon that is limited to two uses per round. When the square and cross buttons are pressed together the background scenery drops out, leaving just the players, and a colourful special effect is unleashed. Some of these are spectacular, others are daft and most only have an effect over a short range.

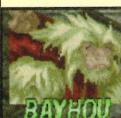
None of these changes make *Toshinden* a connoisseurs fighting game and winning is still a case of hitting buttons in a fairly random style. Battles are all similar in style, with huge special effects the order of the day - skillful and thoughtful series of attacks are simply not catered for. Apparently accommodating these additions has been rather problematic for the programmers as characters are now noticeably less detailed.



RESPONDING TO THE NUMBER OF CHARACTERS ON OFFER IN TEKKEN 2, TOSHINDEN NOW HAS SUB BOSSSES.



NAME: BAY HOU
HEIGHT: 145CM
WEIGHT: 38KG
AGE: UNKNOWN
BLOODYTYPE: UNKNOWN
NATIONALITY: CHINESE

 Small fry weirdo from the planet of the apes. Many moves have been stolen from the magician Fo Fai so expect flaming plasma energy balls combined with slashing claw attacks. Notable for his slow movement, inefficient attacks and the way he shows off his bald bottom at defeated opponents.

Alter ego: A far more controllable female named Cuieling. With longer claws and more nimble footwork.



NAME: RUNGO IRON
HEIGHT: 198CM
WEIGHT: 92.6KG
AGE: 32
BLOODYTYPE: A
NATIONALITY: AMERICAN

 Slow and cumbersome and without any sign of subtlety, this Iron man often has difficulty staying on his feet, especially when attempting spinning kicks. On the plus side, Rungo can pull off heavy duty power moves and loves to use head butts.

Alter ego: Tough as old boots and easily capable of delivering the most powerful special attacks and then celebrates wins by spinning his head around.



NAME: MONDO
HEIGHT: 179CM
WEIGHT: 66KG
AGE: 44
BLOODYTYPE: AB
NATIONALITY: JAPANESE

 Getting on in years but still effective with his massive extendible Bo stick, Mondo is a long range specialist. Strong and easy for beginners to get to grips with, he enjoys twirling his staff like a majorette and has fireballs at his disposal.

Alter ego: An oversized Gnome like creature with a nose like Cyrano de Bergerac, Toujin certainly seems to have some kind of rocket launcher concealed beneath his robes.



NAME: DUKE B RAMBERT
HEIGHT: 190CM
WEIGHT: 75KG
AGE: 31
BLOODYTYPE: A
NATIONALITY: FRENCH

 Another of the characters from the original game, Duke relies solely on attacks with his massive sword - unlike Cantona he's no good with kicking attacks. Particularly adept at powerfully slamming opponents into walls and the ceiling, he can get through rounds without using special moves.

Alter ego: They don't come much bigger than Balga, who devastates with his two handed sword.



As is traditional with fighting games produced in Japan, a long, tacky intro sequence gives a taste of some of the characters on offer. Learn what motivates them to fight and wonder why some have eyes the size of saucers.



NAME: ELLIS
HEIGHT: 160CM
WEIGHT: 47KG
AGE: 18
BLOODYTYPE: O
NATIONALITY: TURKISH

Sweet and innocent, with oversized eyes that the Japanese love. Ellis kills you with her love. Her special attack consists of a shower of blood-red love hearts. Great at close quarters, but this leaves her open to the special moves, her attacks are fairly weak.

Alter ego: Pygmy with a blow pipe Atahua. Don't laugh in this warrior's face as he has rather swift attacks and can discharge a load of shrunken skulls.



NAME: SOFIA
HEIGHT: 172.5CM
WEIGHT: 50KG
AGE: 26
BLOODYTYPE: A
NATIONALITY: RUSSIAN

Perfectly formed and rather scantly clad, Sofia is one of those characters that can get by from just using one attack - a multi strike whip affair. Great at over head kicks and spins, she picks opponents up by their collar and slaps them till they're blue.

Alter ego: Cat woman Zola begins each round licking herself clean and has a rather tasty skin tight outfit, but she differs little from her sister character.



NAME: TRACY
HEIGHT: 164CM
WEIGHT: 48KG
AGE: 22
BLOODYTYPE: B
NATIONALITY: AMERICAN

Policewoman Tracy is swift and aggressive, able to outwit most competitors with her stick twirling combos. If she looks in trouble she can always fall back on a long range bolt of power from her many truncheons.

Alter ego: Apart from owning double bared bat-tens, there is really nothing Rachael can do that Tracy can't. All the same moves and unfortunately a bit of a disappointment.



NAME: CHAOS
HEIGHT: 235CM
WEIGHT: 70KG
AGE: 36
BLOODYTYPE: B
NATIONALITY: SHRI LANKAN

Feeling less like a mad man than in his first appearance, Chaos is awkward and gangly with some rather daft methods of attack. His power weapon leaves him lying on the floor and some of his breath attacks are feeble, although it is possible to make him heave on prone adversaries.

Alter-ego: Schultz sports a moustache and moves like a demon, firing a number of different weapons.



NAME: GAI
HEIGHT: 214CM
WEIGHT: 91KG
AGE: 41
BLOODYTYPE: O
NATIONALITY: JAPANESE



Bigger than Bruno, but powerful and quick to finish anyone off who stands in the way, Gaia uses his sword to pin people to the ground via the chest. His special weapons include phenomenally bad breath and the ability to cause earth tremors.

Alter ego: Tau is actually even bigger, carries a rather girly blow pipe, and wields a meat cleaver large enough to cut a bus in half.



NAME: NAGISA IWASHIRO
HEIGHT: 182CM
WEIGHT: 94KG
AGE: 36
BLOODYTYPE: O
NATIONALITY: JAPANESE



Nagisa can loose off three clips of ammo, accounting for 14 separate hits that wipe out half a power bar. If that's not enough, he also has a special attack that hits his opponent no matter where they are standing.

Alter ego: The mysterious Vermilion. Great with rolling kicks, and likes to ensnare victims in puppet strings before completely blowing them away.



NAME: DAVID
HEIGHT: 168CM
WEIGHT: 56KG
AGE: 15
BLOODYTYPE: AB
NATIONALITY: ENGLISH



So young and yet so capable with a chainsaw, David can put together attacks very, very quickly and is particularly good at going for the groin. He also carries a small pistol that comes in handy for the killer blow and his special move is to lob a grenade.

Alter ego: Ice Hockey masked Judgment, faster with a longer chainsaw that leaves sinister bloody traces and a rather creepy laugh.



NAME: SHIZUKU FUJI
HEIGHT: 169CM
WEIGHT: 49KG
AGE: 23
BLOODYTYPE: A
NATIONALITY: JAPANESE



Full of grace and poise, sadly this Geisha girl is weak, impeded by a dress that must have shrunk in the wash. Specialities include helicopter attacks, darts that knock players out and an extendible staff with a whip like attachment.

Alter ego: Miss Til's staff may be longer, but her skirt is just as impractical. With the special strike being a wave of butterflies.

Opinion Randomly press all the buttons and watch the huge and colourful attacks that result. Sure the action runs at a fair rate, especially using one of the more nimble players, with plenty of spectacular moves on offer, loads of characters to gain access to and a new kind of arena, but will all this be enough to win our hearts, minds and wallets. I think not. If sequels really are your bag, why not wait to see what Tekken 3 has to offer, otherwise make a break from the past and check out Soul Edge. JM

PSP RATING...

Graphics : 80
Animation : 76
Sound FX : 68
Music : 70
Lastability : 69
Playability : 73

76

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 Most Cards Taken!

Strikepoint

The Hex Missions



PILOT YOUR HEAVILY ARMED HELICOPTER GUN-SHIP OVER VARIOUS LANDSCAPES, DESTROYING ALL MANNER OF ENEMIES. SOUNDS FUN? ACTUALLY IT'S RATHER DULL I'M AFRAID.

Certain things in life are inevitable. Toast will always fall buttered-side down, especially if your carpet needs a good hoover; Policemen only ever appear when you least want to see them and there will never be any shortage of evil organisations determined to take over or destroy the world. In *Strikepoint The Hex Missions*, the group in question (Hex), has planted Shockwave devices throughout the world in an attempt to destroy the eco-sphere. Exactly how these weapons wreak their terrible devastation, or indeed what an eco-sphere is, remains a mystery.

Not surprisingly, Earth defence organisations are a little worried by this unspecified environmental threat and so have formed Strikepoint, a special force with lots of helicopters and little fear. As head of the chopper squad it is your duty to hunt down, de-activate and collect up these devices of doom. On the way to achieving this goal, scientists who have been kidnapped for intelligence reasons need to be rescued, convoys of vehicles must be ambushed and artillery destroyed.

As you've probably already guessed, this game doesn't pack many punches in the originality or surprise departments. Pilot a large and heavily armed helicopter over an undulating landscape, wiping out other helicopters, aircraft and a variety of land-based targets. Achieve vari-

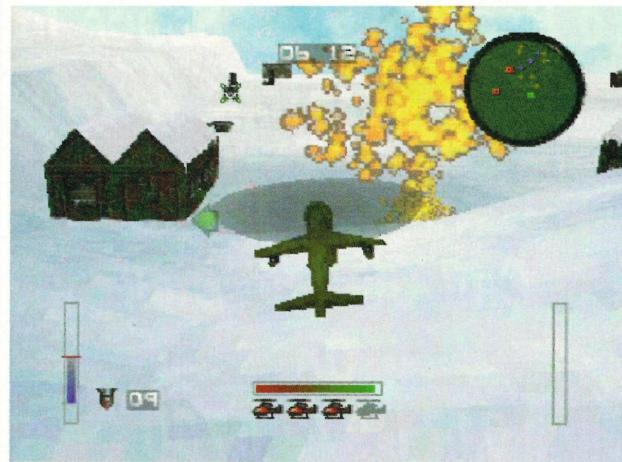


SEARCH OUT STRANGE SHOCK-WAVE DEVICES AND DISARM THEM USING THE GREEN BEAM WEAPON.

ous mission objectives within a specified time limit, then move on to another destination and more missions.

After a short, soft focused and grainy FMV sequence, the game kicks off with options for one or two player games, then it's off to the hanger to pick your craft. Three vehicles are on offer, each with different attributes, and joy of joys they come in three shades of camouflage so there is no need to turn up in battle wearing last season's colours.

ON THE BUSES
With separate controls for rota angle, thrust and collective, helicopters are often thought of as twitchy, skippy creatures. Startling evidence from Strikepoint however,



ALL TOOLED UP

Secondary equipment is selected via the R1 and R2 buttons. As you shuffle through the options, the voice of a co-pilot informs you of your current selection. Items 1-4 are limited, but picking up crates replenishes them.

1. AIR TO GROUND MIS-SILES: USEFUL FOR QUICKLY TAKING OUT GROUND TARGETS WHILEST UNDER HEAVY FIRE.



2. AIR TO AIR MIS-SILES: FAR MORE ACCURATE THAN THE CANNON, BUT SHOULD DEFINITELY BE SAVED FOR THE LARGER TARGETS.



3. BOMBS: PRIMARILY USED FOR BLOWING UP CONVOYS OF TANKS, BOATS, ETC. BUT THEY ARE UNGUIDED AND TRICKY TO USE.



4. TURBO: MISSION TIME RESTRAINTS ARE TOUGH, SO USE THESE BOOSTERS TO WHIP QUICKLY BETWEEN TARGETS.



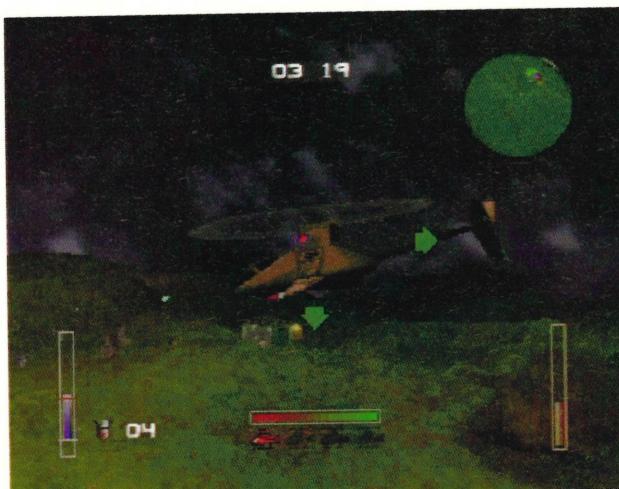
5. LANDING ICON: DIRECTS YOU TO THE NEAREST LANDING PAD, THEN AUTO LANDS TO REPLENISH BROKEN OR DAMAGED SHIELDS.



6. GREEN BEAM: A TRACTOR BEAM FOR HAULING ON BOARD SCIENTISTS, CRATES AND SHOCKWAVE DEVICES, OR ANYTHING ELSE.



Release : JANUARY
Company : ELITE
Price : £44.95
Players : 1-2
Genre : SHOOT 'EM UP



THESE GREEN ARROWS TELL YOU TO TURN LEFT OR RIGHT, UP OR DOWN, TO TRACK THE POSITION OF YOUR NEXT MISSION OBJECTIVE.

suggests that piloting one of these craft is very similar to driving a rusty old bus, only with a worse turning circle and slower acceleration. Precision work is therefore fairly tricky and made all the more difficult by the out of vehicle view which tends to obscure targets. A cockpit option has been included but visibility obviously wasn't at the top of the designer's list as most of the screen is taken up by a very bland and wobbly interior. On display is the remaining mission time, a radar, speed indicator, an energy bar, number of lives remaining, an altitude meter, directional arrows to guide you to objectives and the secondary weapon indicator.

Strikepoint's weapon system is a fairly standard affair, with small, jerky cross hairs targeting the enemy automatically. Sweep the landscape, lock onto your prey

and let rip with cannons or which ever special weapon is selected. Unfortunately destroying vehicles or buildings lacks satisfaction as explosions are pathetic bursts of light – rather odd considering that first and foremost *Strikepoint* is a shoot 'em up.

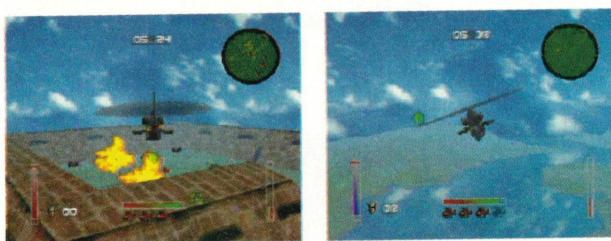
In game, music sometimes proves amusing – kind of '80s theme tunes meets Starskey and Hutch hammond organs and wacka wacka guitars, if you see what I mean. Effects, such as the constant rotor whirr or rattling chain guns are a different matter, sounding as if they were recorded in a biscuit tin.

Enemy forces and buildings are varied but unimaginative and poorly realised. Go up against tanks, scud launchers, bombers, experimental fighters, boats and zeppelins. Bomb the hell out of factories, fuel dumps,

Opinion *Strikepoint* tries out nothing new on players, but this in itself is not a crime. What is unforgivable here is that it copies everything from its predecessors without making any improvements, and more often than not, it does this in an inferior way. Leave this on the shelf and opt for *Soviet Strike*. JM

HEAD TO HEAD FUN?

Two types of two player action are available, both using split screens. Either choose to go head to head, or get a pal to help out with your missions. Often a feature that saves a poor quality game, in the case of *Strikepoint* it's just another nail in the coffin. The game slows down and jerks about, unfortunately making it a bore to play.



BEFORE LEAVING BASE, YOU HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THREE DIFFERENT HELICOPTERS. NOT ONLY DOES EACH HAVE ITS OWN SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS, THEY ALSO COME IN A CHOICE OF COLOURS.

bridges and power stations. The ingredients of the game may sound very familiar, but what sets this heli-shoot out from the rest is very poor graphics. From a distance most of the enemy weaponry looks like blobs and getting closer fails to reveal any more detail. Movement is even worse, unlike that of any kind of transport you have seen before, with many of the

vehicles able to move through supposedly solid sections of the landscape. Using the word Landscape is being fairly kind. Plains, hills, lakes etc are constructed from colours in mosaic fashion, corresponding roughly to water, rock and desert, with the occasional tree thrown in. Playing the Arctic section gives a fairly accurate feeling of going snow blind. Buildings break up the monotony, but overall the result is a feeling of flying over a giant, dull painting by numbers picture. Textures and shading have gone out the window, and have taken with them any sense of excitement at playing missions set in different regions.

It is possible I guess, that somewhere in this game there are some interesting and novel touches, bothering to play long enough in hope of finding them seems unlikely. I suggest that more fun would be had nailing ones head to a door.

PSP RATING...

Graphics : 65
Animation : 60
Sound FX : 62
Music : 75
Lastability : 68
Playability : 60

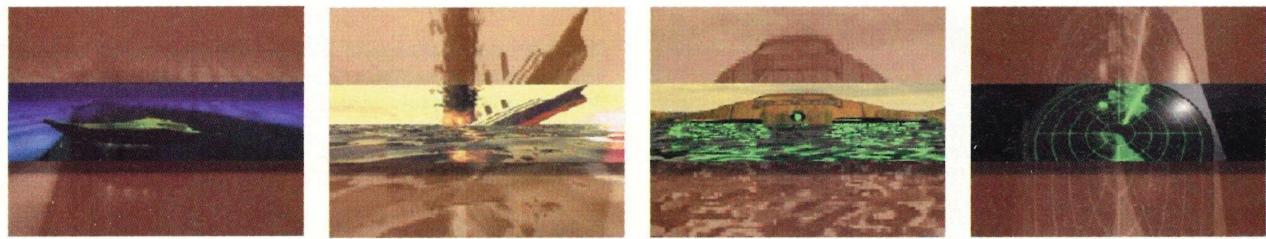
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IS IT REAL?

Whilst some helicopter shoot 'em-ups take pride in using a simulation angle, *Strikepoint* ignores most of these rules. Your craft achieves forward motion without dipping the nose, rate of climb or descent is determined by speed, and the programmers have thoughtfully decided to add a brake.

AS WITH THE FIRST X-COM ADVENTURE, THERE'S AN ATTRACTIVE CARTOON INTRO TO LET YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT IS GOING ON. STRANGELY, IT INVOLVES ALIENS. AND WATER. GOSH.



X-COM - Terror from the Deep



AS WITH X-COM: ENEMY UNKNOWN, ACTION SECTIONS ARE DEALT WITH IN AN ISOMETRIC, TURNS-BASED STRATEGY MODE. YOU MUST JUGGLE TIME AND SKILL TO RETAIN AS MANY AQUANAUTS AS POSSIBLE.

it seems like many moons ago that the aliens first invaded our PlayStations. The machine was relatively new, and everyone was busy trying to produce the best racing game or beat 'em up...



apart from MicroProse, that is. They saw a less-obvious gap in the market, and considering the not-inconsiderable success of their X-COM games (or *UFO* as they were titled originally) on the PC, it seemed like a good way to open up the PlayStation's strategy account.

It is quite easy to see why the first game, *X-COM: Enemy Unknown*, went down so well, as it was a truly unique product for the machine at the time. With more 'resource management' than action, it tasked you to watch the skies and protect the planet from an alien invasion. Well, now they're back, and this time they're wet.

Truth be told, the fact that the aliens are now inhabiting the Earth's seas makes no real odds to the game. Originally you placed your bases around the various countries and utilised soldiers in flight suits, while this time round you plop your base into the sea and command aquanauts in funky diving equipment. There are

new, water-oriented weapons to get to grips with, but to be brutally frank again, it doesn't take an experienced X-COM player long to match up these 'new' weapons with their previous identities of not so long ago.

DIVE, DIVE!

The race against time is staged in an identical fashion as before, with your scientists desperately trying to understand new technology and pass this on to your own manufacturing plants as soon as possible, as you attempt to bring your crew's equipment and weaponry more inline with that which is being used by your enemy.

The user interface for the isometric battle sections is (and I must say, I'm getting pretty bored of repeating myself here, but it is...) exactly the same as it was in *Enemy Unknown*, with the player

having complete control over how his or her troops are deployed and make use of their ration of skill, strength and time. Performing any task – whether it be trudging across the bottom of the sea carrying the heaviest cannon available, or simply changing trousers – burns up valuable time 'units' before that aquanaut's turn is over and you move on to the next trooper. This continues through your entire squad until it's time for the slimy ones to have their turn. This is where your patience is put to the test as, if you can restrain yourself



Release : Out Now

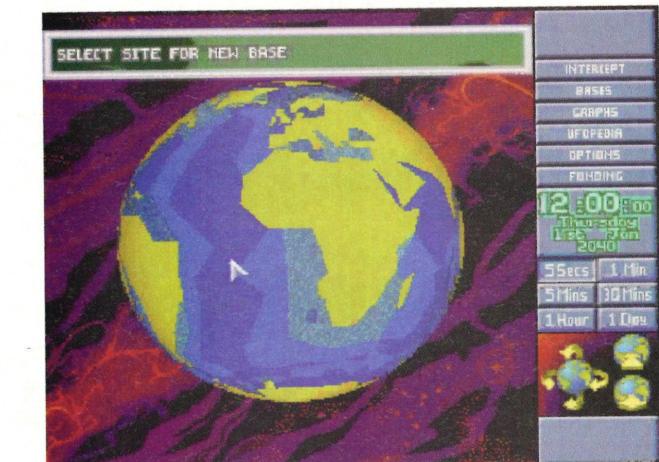
Company : MICROPROSE

Price : £44.99

Players : 1

Genre : STRATEGY

Opinion I personally was a huge fan of *X-COM: Enemy Unknown*, so I was delighted to see the sequel finally make its way onto the PlayStation. However, for all its excellent strategy and long-lasting gameplay, it must be said that this is really just more of the same... only with bubbles. Once you get used to the new aliens, weapons and colour schemes it's really just the same game all over again. I'm not overly concerned about this – *Enemy Unknown* was quite a while ago – but it would have been nice to see some new ideas incorporated. Highly recommended to those that didn't see the first game, but perhaps too similar for experienced X-COMers.



THIS MAIN SCREEN IS CALLED THE GEOSCAPE, AND ALLOWS YOU TO VIEW ALIEN AND ALLIED ACTIVITY. YOU CAN ZOOM RIGHT IN TO INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES, OR LOOK DOWN FROM ORBIT TO TRACK ALIEN MOVEMENT AND FOLLOW PURSUITS.



enough not to spend every unit of time and strength during 'your turn', something called 'opportunity play' comes into effect. Basically this means that, should an otherwise unseen alien make himself visible to one of your aquanauts during the aliens' turn, and you've left your man with enough time units to do something about it, you can effectively interrupt the alien's move, and take a shot. Of course, the aliens can do this to you, so it all becomes very much a question of 'do you creep around slowly, saving units for opportunity fire' or just cover as much distance and perform as much activity as possible during your turn, and just prey no alien bugger finds you hiding inside an old boot or empty coke can during their turn!

INDEPENDENCE DAY

As well as bettering your odds against the alien foe through research and development, individual soldiers also improve with experience, collecting enhanced abilities along the way. This also has an effect on your team as a whole, so send in a trooper of six aquanaut 'Seamen' led by a 'Commander' and everyone will enjoy better strength, moral, reactions and firing accuracy. Sadly, you do run the risk that, should the commanding officer be killed, the inexperienced troops can panic and get very depressed, listening to Pink Floyd records and simply 'going home' halfway through an important mission. Or something.



WHENEVER AN ALIEN CRAFT IS SPOTTED ABOVE THE SURFACE, THE GAME ZOOMS IN ON THE ACTION TO GIVE YOU A BETTER FEEL FOR WHERE YOUR BASES AND CRAFT ARE IN RELATION TO THE THREAT.

Hi-tech weapons also improve soldier's firing accuracy, as does the choice of shot that's available to you. Spend tons of time units on an 'aimed' shot, and the percentage odds of hitting the target over distance are greatly improved. However, should you get caught with your rubbers down, loose off a 'snap shot' and hope the tide's moving in your favour.

Now I'm sure that pretty much everything I've said here will seem remarkably familiar to anyone who's

played the previous game, *Enemy Unknown*, and there's a reason for that – it's because it is the same. Remarkably so, in fact. However, don't let this completely put you off, because I must say that I've still thoroughly enjoyed playing *X-COM: Terror From The Deep*, and if you haven't yet experienced strategy games on the PlayStation, now's your chance to do so. Definitely not of the calibre as the likes of *Command and Conquer*, but still a highly playable game.



YOU CAN'T BE EXPECTED TO KNOW EVERYTHING FROM THE VERY START, SO MAKE USE OF THE HIGHLY-INFORMATIVE UFPEDIA TO FILL IN THE GAPS. HOWEVER, UNLIKE THE FIRST X-COM GAME, YOU HAVE TO RESEARCH TO GAIN ACCESS TO SUCH NUGGETS.

PSP RATING...

Graphics : 56
Animation : 68
Sound FX : 70
Music : 79
Lastability : 88
Playability : 85

82

Parappa the Rapper

there is an unwritten rule that there are just seven different styles of video game, and any that stray away from the original septet are normally a cross-breed between two categories. For the first time in over ten years, however, Sony of Japan have created a new genre to be listed alongside the likes of 'shoot 'em ups', 'beat 'em ups', and RPGs – the first ever 'Singalong' title. At the recent PlayStation Expo in Tokyo, *Parappa the Rapper* was the undisputed king of the show. No other game of the 200 on display came close to matching the word of mouth Sony's bizarre release was given and the crowds surrounding the huge cuddly Parappa character were transfixed by what they



AS THE BATTLE OF THE LYRICS BEGINS, THE CAMERA PANS IN AND AROUND, CONCENTRATING ON THE CURRENT RAPPER.



SAVING GRACE

Parappa the Rapper features a comprehensive save game system which not only stores the user's greatest raps to date, but also allows them to be replayed Karaoke-style. The user-friendliness of the Japanese version is incredible also in that by selecting one of the menus, the lyrics of each of the raps can be displayed at the bottom of the screen in English for everyone to sing along to!



programmes where the presenters tried to teach kids about minims and semi-briefs by using lights to highlight notes as they were played. The titular hero is as strange as the game itself, and appears to be a small dog dressed in the obligatory rapper hooded top and woolly hat. Parappa's main aim, and thus that of the player, is to become the greatest rap star

were seeing. Although it fails to fall into any previous categories, at its most basic *Parappa the Rapper* is a mix of the old electronic game, *Simon*, and one of those old music

in his neighbourhood, and this means taking on a number of opponents with similar goals in a bizarre rap equivalent to the duelling banjos scene in *Deliverance*...

GOING FOR A SONG
Parappa opens with a series of options, allowing the user to save or load a stored position, but the simplicity of the game means that the majority of players will dive straight into the bizarrely-drawn streets of *Parappa the Rapper* Town where the game is set. As the screenshots show, *Parappa the Rapper* is a game to show off to a group of non machine-owning friends, but before we delve into the intricacies of the superb aesthetics, the gameplay. As Parappa and his current rival dance away in the centre of the screen, a small scrolling cursor moves across

a dotted bar to the top-left of the screen. Punctuating the bar are a number of symbols immediately recognisable from the joypad, with the familiar crosses, circles and squares, occasionally broken up by Ls and Rs, representing the shoulder buttons, and provoking a particular speech sample when pressed. As the onscreen rapping duel takes place, the cursor moves in time with the music, and when the CPU character has finished their line, it falls to the player to help Parappa mimic it. As such, combinations of face and shoulder buttons come into play, with the player awarded points as the music rounds continue.

TAKING THE RAP

Timing is everything in *Parappa the Rapper*, and if the player misses a button press

TIME FOR A BREAK...



Release : Out Now
Company : SONY
Price : IMPORT
Players : 1
Genre : SINGALONG

or mis-times it slightly, they are penalised and points are subtracted from the accumulating total. The standard of Parappa's vocal talents are gauged by a 'U Rap' metre overlaid on the right-hand side of the screen. Depending on how well the player is responding to the task set down by the opponent, their rating veers between 'Awful', 'Bad' (as in the proper sense of the word), 'Good' and 'Cool.' Providing Parappa stays in the 'Good' region at the end of the song, he moves on to the next, but failure to do so sends him back to the start of the song. Simple stuff, but utterly engrossing, and should a player attain 'Cool' status (a nigh-on impossible task), they are rewarded with the CPU relinquishing the stage, and leaving the player to freestyle rap to the end of the song. In addition to

sound capabilities. Via a series of introductory animations, the player is shown Parappa and his mates getting into assorted scrapes and Parappa deciding that honing his rap skills will help him bypass certain problems in his life. For example, having been bullied by local hooligans in his local burger bar Parappa heads for the local Dojo, where out-rapping the local martial arts expert endows him with the skills needed to turn on the bullies. Similarly, as Parappa continues we see him using his skills to get to the front of a queue for the toilet, taking his driving test, and baking a cake. In addition to allowing the team to flex their graphical muscle, each of the characters boasts a distinctive rapping style with the martial artist boasting a puncy style (no pun intended), while a frog that works



assisting younger players with the layout of the PlayStation pad, *Parappa the Rapper* is just amazing fun to play. The copied lyrics must be perfectly timed, and some of the later rappers make things incredibly tough with complex strings of vocals which require close-knit button presses, and it's incredibly easy to get absorbed into the whole experience – particularly if a group of people are also taking part, and when improvisation can send Parappa's hope either way.

GOING FOR A SONG
Anyone who isn't instantly taken with Parappa's presentation is more than likely set to be visited by three ghosts every Christmas. As can be expected of a game which is based around music, it is probably the most incredible display of the PlayStation's

at the local flea market is the reptilian equivalent to Shaggy – and incredibly hard to emulate.

Graphically, *Parappa the Rapper* is as off-beat as its basic premise, and as impressive as the music. English artist, Rodney Greenblat has created a bizarre yet totally endearing set of characters, who move and dance superbly thanks to some incredibly smooth animation. The game looks like a picture book brought to life, and as the rap progresses, a number of camera views are used to pan in and out of the action – revealing the flat 2D nature of the sprites as it pans around them! From the karate master – complete with an onion for a head, and shallots as young disciples – through to the chicken who is a TV chef and 'Inspector Mooselini' the driving



IF PARAPPA SQUEEZES HIS RATING INTO THE 'COOL' ZONE, HE IS INVITED TO FREESTYLE RAP.

effect is mesmerising, and as the game was played it wasn't uncommon for crowds of people to gather round the office PlayStations.

A SONG FOR EUROPE?

As of yet, Sony UK aren't committed to bringing Parappa to the attention of PAL users, and bearing in mind the unusual nature of the game this is both understandable and a shame. While its initial appeal provides enough hook for on and off play, we'd be the first to admit that Parappa is a game that you probably won't get constant enjoyment from. Some of the rap judging is a little dubious at times, and

EACH RAPPER USES A DIFFERENT STYLE, FROM THE BLUNT EFFORT OF CHOP-CHOP ONION, TO RAGGA FROG AT THE MARKET – COMPLETE WITH LENGTHY LYRICS TO IMIMIC.



Opinion We don't ordinarily review import games, but *Parappa the Rapper* is such a breath of fresh air, we feel it deserves all the exposure it can get. Although it is basically the old 'Simon' electronic game hidden beneath stunning graphics and music, the stunning presentation gels perfectly with the simple yet incredibly addictive gameplay creating more of an experience than a game. Sony UK may not commit themselves to releasing Parappa in the UK, which is a pity yet understandable (apparently PAL owners don't like things that break new ground, they cite *Aquanaut's Holiday* as an example), yet those of you wanting to see just how innovative designers can be should singalongaParappa as soon as possible. SM

instructor, the unusual (to say the least) appearance of *Parappa the Rapper* only goes to add to the general fresh feeling that the game exudes. In addition to their dancing skills, the characters are also animated to tie in with Parappa's fluctuating standard of rapping. For example, as the 'U-Rap' metre sinks into the 'Awful' zone the Kung Fu master lies down in shame before ordering the rap duel to a halt. The overall

can prove impossible to progress for a while, then all of a sudden three or four levels are instantly beaten. That said, since Parappa arrived, it has been a constant source of amusement in the office, and is also a breath of fresh air in a market dominated by 3D racers and home-grown platform heroes. I sincerely hope Sony change their mind, as Parappa proves the versatility of the Sony machine beyond all doubt.

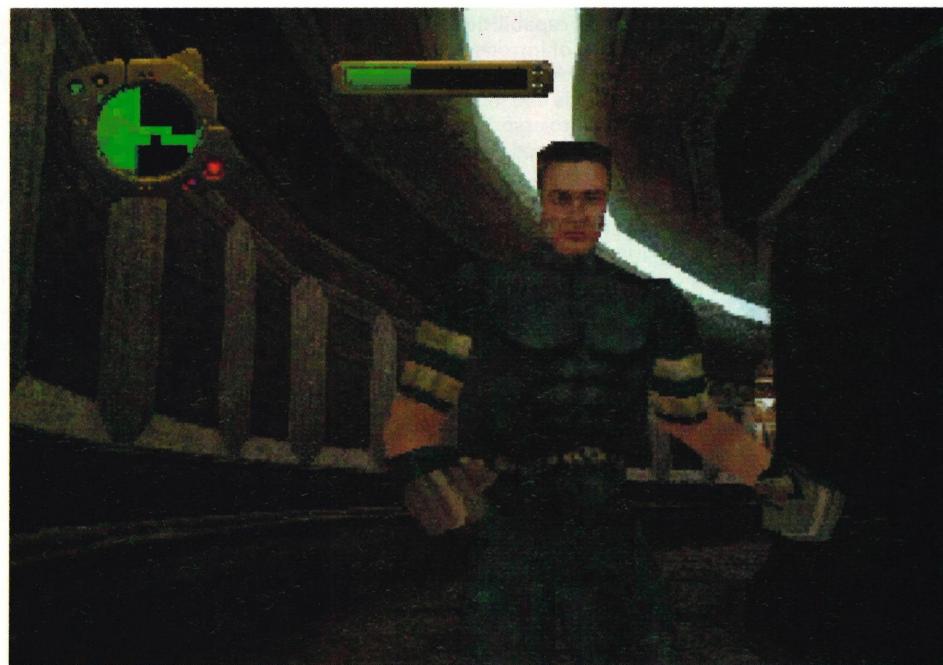
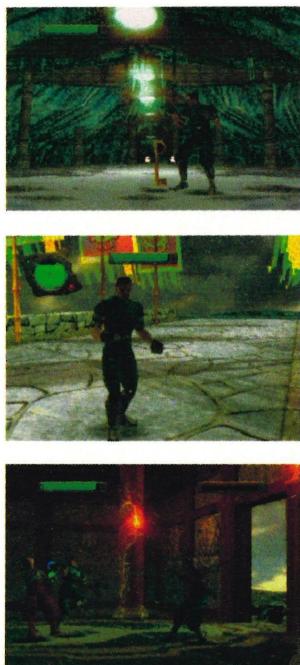


PSP RATING...

Graphics : 91
Animation : 88
Sound FX : 97
Music : 98
Lastability : 80
Playability : 84

82

ELECTRONIC ARTS LOOK TO HAVE SET THEMSELVES UP FOR A FALL BY DESCRIBING PERFECT WEAPON AS TEKKEN 2 MEETS RESIDENT EVIL



Perfect Weapon

1ights in the sky; sightings of mysterious flying craft followed by tales of abductions and horrifying experiments by weird little creatures on alien planets. X-File fodder or deranged ranting from lunatics? Neither, it's the new action adventure game from Electronic Arts, *Perfect Weapon*.

Earth Defence Force's top agent, Commander Blake Hunter has been kidnapped. Not bundled into the back of a transit at gun point with a sack over his head, but whipped away by the henchmen of an evil space Overlord. This no good dark tyrant entertains himself by grabbing characters he feels are the best of each species he encounters from different planets across the universe, he then takes them to foreign worlds where they must fight for survival.

As if more of an incentive were needed to do battle, it seems that if you are defeat-

ed by one of these other alien species, Earth will be torched, so the future of the human race also rests on your shoulders. Luckily for us Blake is no push over, his martial artist fighting skills are legendary, so it's off to save mankind and find a way home then.

MORE MOVES THAN PICKFOLDS

Taking a peek at the manual and discovering the number of button combinations available in *Perfect Weapon* you'd be forgiven for thinking you're about to encounter something fairly sophisticated. Jump, dash, run, crouch, relax, explore, back flip (with or without 180 degree turn), and the list of combat moves is even more comprehensive: several basic kicks and strikes, tackles and grapples and a plethora of combos.



BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL AGAINST A LOAD OF ALIENS. THE DESTINY OF MANKIND IS IN YOUR HANDS.

ATTACKED BY THE MOB

Development team, Gray Matter, have invented a spanking new system that dictates what baddies will do called Behavioural Artificial Intelligence. BAI allows up to five aliens to attack Cmdr Hunter simultaneously and during the demo this looks quite effective, as a group of goons are shown all dishing out a heavy pasting to our hero. In game this system isn't really evident; one enemy tends to strike whilst others hold back and watch you roast their pals.



**Release : FEBRUARY
Company : EA
Price : £44.95
Players : 1
Genre : ????**

Opinion Billed by Electronic Arts as *Resident Evil* meets *Tekken 2*, developers of *Perfect Weapon* had a pretty tall order to fill and boy did they fail. Commendable for its intention, but sadly nothing else about this game can be recommended to anyone. Sluggish, dull, uneventful, tedious...need I go on? Forget you even heard about this game. A perfect pile of rubbish. JM

Impressive stuff, until you switch the game on and get just a small taste of the quality of the intro sequence.

Two prize fighters are battling it out in a kick boxing ring, one is our hero Blake, although that's just a guess because these 'people' look as well built as something from *Blue Peter*'s reject bin and must use about three polygons. Movement is equally impressive and you get an overwhelming sense that you may be about to play a game that's almost as enjoyable as shards of glass rammed under your finger nails.

BOG MATERIAL

First impressions can be misleading, unfortunately *Perfect Weapon* lives up to these expectations. Control of Blake is slow and difficult, feeling like wading through a bog no matter which world you are unlucky to be stuck on. Execution of special moves is possible, but the result is uninspiring. In the end this bored reviewer opted for using the sweep kick to deal death to all enemies, and found this sufficient to complete levels. There may well be 100 martial arts strikes to be found but is it really worth searching for them?

Five planets are waiting to be conquered: Ice World; Garden World; Forest World; Desert World and Morgone - that list must have taken some thinking up! Play consists of walking from one area to another, killing things, picking up the odd item, then moving on. Worthy of special note is the way Blake continually gets stuck on unseen ridges and keeps repeating 'no way' to

himself. This feature alone, which requires jumping around like a Kangaroo to progress through a screen, will be enough to make most gamers switch off.

As he makes his way though the dull backdrops, Blake interacts with scenery very poorly, interfering with most things he comes into contact with. Sometimes he loses his ankles, at other points he's had his arms rudely chopped off and he's not bad at completely melding into objects. No care or attention has gone into the



little details that make a game look good. For instance walking up stairs makes no difference to the animation, Blake still looks like he is shuffling along a flat surface. The shadow beneath his feet is always the same size and never leans in a direction, even when light is meant to be somewhere other than directly overhead.

Screens are designed with no particular look or purpose in mind and are just there to be walked through. Most appear very samey, and have annoying obstacles that block a quick route out of mono-

ny. Completely static backgrounds offer no interest and are lifeless, for example lights on walls do not flicker or change in any way and are drawn like the star on a cheap Christmas card.

Enemies ranges from things that crawl on four legs, to things that stand on two, looking very much like life on Earth, which is surprising considering you are meant to be fighting against aliens. Bob cats, cavemen, karate students, all are constructed unrealistically and look as though they might



FOUR LEVELS OF BOREDOM ARE THERE TO PLAY THROUGH. GAMES SHOULD BE FUN SHOULD'T THEY.

fall apart any minute. Killing these leads to a strange death effect that may represent the soul departing the body. Fighting them can be tricky as camera angles are often daft, for instance some are set about 600 feet up in the air. The game engine is slow to realise when Blake has disappeared off the screen, so battles can be fought without knowing what the hell is going on.

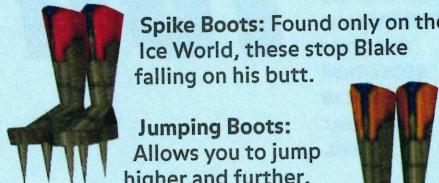
Pandemonium used a revolutionary system which allowed players to sneak a long range view of what was in store up ahead. In *Perfect Weapon* it's possible to see that you are about to encounter blobs of colour, which, to my reckoning, is a fairly accurate description.



THE THINGS PEOPLE LEAVE

LYING AROUND

Typically enough a number of items can be found strewn around the landscape of *Perfect Weapon*. Here's the list:



Spike Boots: Found only on the Ice World, these stop Blake falling on his butt.



Jumping Boots: Allows you to jump higher and further.



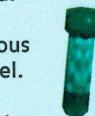
Power Gloves: Surprisingly increases the power of your punches.



Goggles: Prevent health bar depleting when in the bright sun on Desert World.



Metabolism Adjust: Stops Blake from freezing to death on Ice World.



Vaccine: Quick cure to poisonous bites. Once taken lasts for that level.



Health: Replenishes about a third of Blake's health bar.



Strength: Take this and turn purple, taking less damage and increasing power.



Beacon: Reveals a quarter of the map at a time.



Detector: Pin points hidden power ups and many other icons.



Transmitter: Disables lasers that may be blocking doors.



Energy Egg: Left behind after enemies die. Collect enough to leave the level.



Hex Switch: Found on Morgone's world, this button activates secrets.



Key: Opens doors and reveals hidden access routes.



Amulet: There are four pieces to collect and place in special points. Opens a secret room on desert level.

ONE HUNDRED DIFFERENT MARTIAL ARTS MOVES, BUT WHO CARES WHEN THE GAMEPLAY STINKS LIKE A DEAD HORSE LEFT IN THE SUN FOR WEEKS.

PSP RATING...

Graphics : 65

Animation : 60

Sound FX : 52

Music : 50

Lastability : 55

Playability : 58

51

THE ROUTINES USED TO MOVE THE PINS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER ARE INCREDIBLY REALISTIC, WITH THE PINS SPINNING AND KNOCKING EACH OTHER OVER AS IN THE REAL THING.

Ten Pin Alley



the history of video games is littered with bizarre ideas which probably should never have left the drawing board. Macsen's short stab at Spectrum games, for example, threw up the likes of *Treasure Hunt* and *Blockbusters*, based on the popular TV shows. In the former, a monochromatic helicopter flitted about while the player searched for clues in the game's thick manual, while the latter invited the player to ask a digitised Bob Holness for a T, please. Add

STEPPING UP

The different characters' play styles are determined by a number of factors. Players are left or right-handed, some have more strength than others, while others lean towards accuracy over power. The differences in each are reflected in the different power bars used to line up each shot. Chucky, for example, is very much Joe Average with normal power and accuracy ratings, making him the ideal choice the novice. However, Dean leans towards speed for his shots, and unless the user's timing is spot-on, the majority of his bowls miss the target completely. Finally, Little Jill is the diminutive young girl who seemingly struggles to lift the ball, and doesn't have a huge amount of power to send it towards the pins.

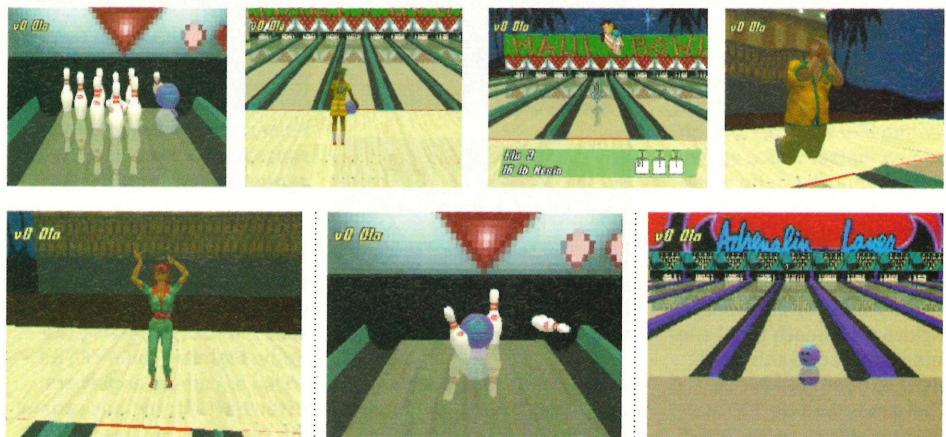
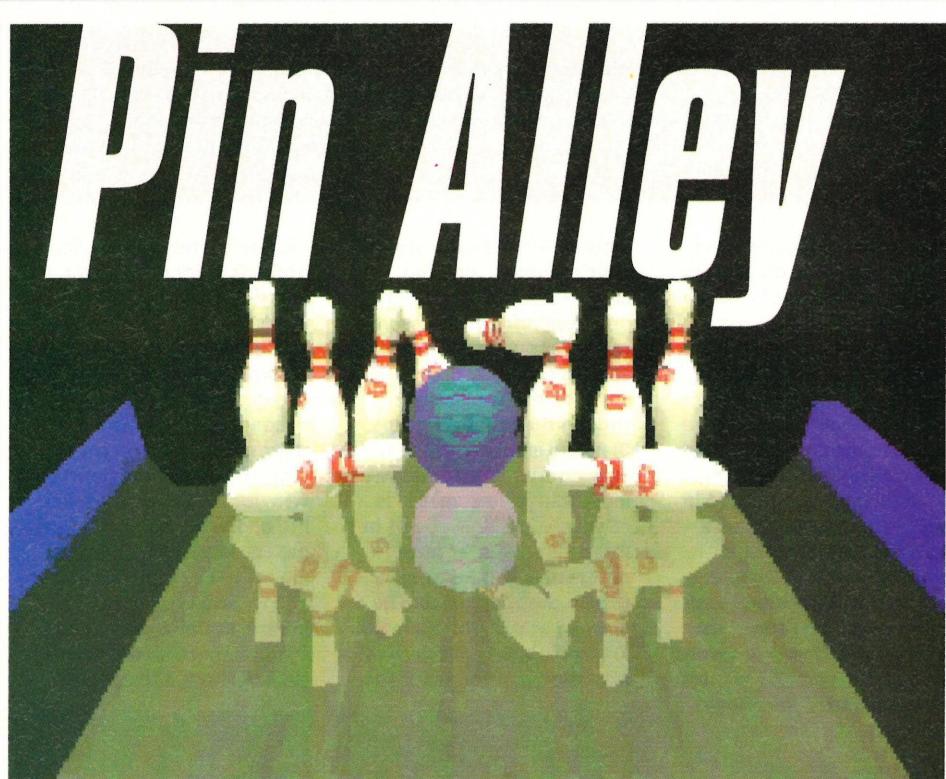
Release : MARCH '97

Company : EA

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-6

Genre : SPORT SIM



to this license based on *Minder*, *Eastenders*, and numerous crossword-based puzzle games, and there is enough wasted cassettes to duplicate the Sergeant Pepper album and give everyone a copy for free.

With so many oddball titles around, the last company we expected to join this less than illustrious list are EA. Their continued plans for sports sim domination has seen them attempt football, tennis, rugby, ice hockey, and golf in the past, but now the Langley giants have completely left the beaten track as ten pin bowling gets the EA treatment. Oddly enough, as strange as the subject matter may be, this isn't the first video game interpretation of the popular post-pub sport, with Access creating *Tenth Frame* which was incredibly successful. EA's game opts for a showbiz feel, with the

players on offer all caricatures with strange celebratory rituals and pratfall routines if the shot goes awry. After all, to quote EA's sport logo 'if it's in the game, it's in the game...'

STEPPING UP...

Ten Pin Alley is a bizarre fusion of oddball characters yet incredibly comprehensive controls. The main options screen opens and allows up to six players to join in, while two glitzy alley designs are available to complement the comedic players. The players on offer include Chucky an overweight player with little in the way of power, but considerable accuracy, while Dean is a bit of a star player, while Flo (who resembles Cher's character in 'Mermaids') and Dot provide the female interest – with a handful of others also on hand to supply their unique

play styles. *Ten Pin Alley* is every bit as user-friendly as past EA Sports titles, and play options include the ability to control the weight, colour and design of your ball, practice trick shots to amaze your mates, and enter one of several tournaments.

Once all these options are to the user's liking, the lanes are opened and the rendered polygonal characters step up for their shots. The 'Swing-o-metre' system made famous by countless PGA Tour titles has been bastardised for the bowling duties, with the player first setting the position of a cursor and the starting point of the run-up, before the view switches to next to the preparing player. Besides the player is a rather large pair of curved bars, within which are highlighted points. With the positioning of the shot set, a pointer shoots around the bar, and

pressing one of the facia buttons stops its progress before it shoots down towards the second marked point, thus determining the accuracy and power of the shot. The view now switches to behind the shot, with extra spin added to the ball via the L and R buttons.

STRIKING HOME

In all honesty, the actual control over the shots is quite good. Adding spin is simplicity itself, and as the ball smashes into the pins they bounce and spin incredibly realistically, often slamming

two marked points, can lean the ball into the centre of the pins for a strike nearly every go. Now, we're not the greatest of bowlers, but even we know that this kind of skill takes years to master – and it kills any lasting appeal the game has.

Such a fundamental flaw in a game which could have been a real laugh is a pity. EA are marketing *Ten Pin Alley* as a game to play with friends. The individual characters with their different bowling styles should mean that each player has to adopt different methods, thus making for a



EACH CHARACTER IS EQUIPPED WITH A DIFFERENT BOWLING STYLE, FROM DEAN'S HARD AND FAST TECHNIQUE, THROUGH TO CHUCKY'S SLOWER BUT MORE METHODICAL STYLE.



into each other and behaving just like in your local alley. However, while the technical aspect of the game is very admirable, the actual random nature of play hasn't been captured at all. It takes ages to become really adept at bowling, as spin and accuracy only come after repeated and consistent play. However, *Ten Pin Alley* suffers from very limited moves which invariably end in a strike – the bowling equivalent to scoring every time from a set piece in a soccer game. Flo, for example, can be positioned to the left of the lane and providing the throw is kept within the throw bar's

varied and competitive title. Instead, after a few games of this the routines will become rather familiar, and the gameplay as stale as three-week old bread.

GOING SPARE

The final nail in *Ten Pin Alley*'s coffin comes via the characters themselves. Humour in video games is a very dodgy beast at the best of times, and *Ten Pin Alley* is the perfect example. For example, as a newcomer to the game, the majority of the player's shots will either go up in the air or into the side of the lane and out of play. Fine, we can live with that. However, the

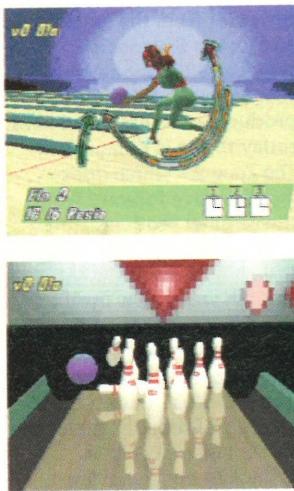
Opinion *Ten Pin Bowling* is a brilliant way to spend a few hours, and there are times when *Ten Pin Alley* is a worthy alternative to going to the local lanes. The way the balls move and collide with the pins is incredibly well done, with the scoreboard accurately marking impossible shots, and spinning pins often leading into some of the spiciest strikes imaginable. However, after awhile a pattern emerges and soon after strikes become surprisingly easy to effect. Couple this with some tedious animations, and you have a game which could have been such good fun, but instead is little more than a curio.

SM

developers have added comedic interludes which show the players getting hit on the head with the ball or grimacing as it slides out of play, and while these are quite amusing the first couple of goes, they prove

incredibly tedious after a short while – particularly as you'd rather spend the time getting to grips with the actual bowling method.

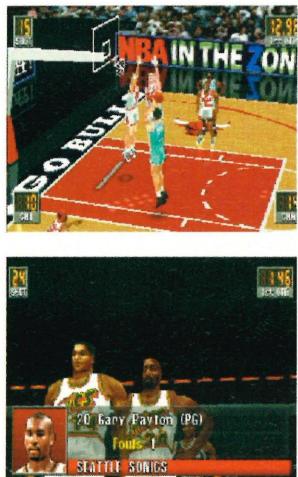
Ten Pin Alley fails as a novelty item because of its two major faults. The casual players that it is aimed at will be bored by the interludes, and the lack of shot variety – despite the many options which allow play to be altered – is an equally irritating factor which limits its appeal even further. It can be called into question as to whether the PlayStation needs a bowling game, as the real thing is invariably much more fun. But there are glimmers of real genius within *Ten Pin Alley*, but all that promise is swept straight out of the window by its two rather glaring faults.



PSP RATING...

Graphics : 73
Animation : 71
Sound FX : 68
Music : 65
Lastability : 43
Playability : 74

54



t 'would seem (might I venture) as though the PlayStation is becoming more like Christmas television all the time. A strange comment I know, but as the likes of Die Hard, The Wizard of Oz and James Bond ("Oh Mr Bond, your suit's all wet!" "Yesh, but my Martini's still dry...") are forever bound to return to our screens year after year, so too it would seem are the various sports sims that have graced the PlayStation in the past. Certainly those clever money-grabbing companies can 'trick us' by suffixing them with a '2' or 'extreme' or simply take the Electronic

AS IS ALWAYS THE CASE, NO EXPENSE HAS BEEN SPARED TO BRING YOU EVERY TEAM YOU COULD EVER WANT TO PLAY WITH.



Arts' route and bung yet another year behind the title ('96, '97, FIFA 2010, etc.) but if we're honest, unless there's some real change to the formula, we don't actually want to know.

Of course that's not to say that such situations don't often clear

Release : ???? '97
Company : A?????
Price : ??????
Players : ??????
Genre : SPORT



the chaff from the wheat, and just as Psygnosis' *WipEout 2097* shone when stood next to *WipEout*, the product we've gathered here today to see is Konami's *In The Zone 2* - which does indeed move forward from the original product.

Do You Remember?
Though we're now used to companies almost deliberately releasing near-identical products 'at' each other, in 'the old days' it was a bit of an event. Probably one of the earliest instances that springs to mind was the

NBA In the Zone 2

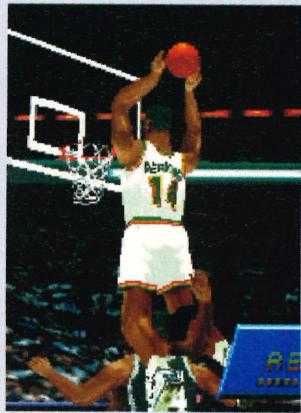


almost simultaneous release of Sony's *Total NBA* and Konami's *NBA In The Zone*. Both were slick products to be sure, but for my money, Konami's basketball simulation was far superior in the playability stakes. While Sony seemed to concentrate on sorting out the slick graphics department, Konami's offering moved in a much more together fashion and just seemed to play with more conviction.

Mind you, we've all moved on somewhat since those crazy days, and whereas programmers once seemed to have to decide between graphics or playability, they've now mastered the machine sufficiently to produce the sort of games that

SLAMS

Although nowhere near as freakish or OTT as seen in the likes of Acclaim's recent *NBA Jam Extreme*, *In The Zone 2* does come complete with a smattering of dramatic slam dunks and 'novelty' baskets. These normally happen automatically depending upon your move towards the basket, so make a clean run through players and scream towards the basket for a rewarding dunk, or interrupt moves and 'dummy' to send hassling opponents the wrong way.



are as good to play as they are to look at. Voila! We have *In The Zone 2*!

DIG IN

As far as instructions go, there's nothing about *In The Zone 2* that won't seem extremely familiar. That said, as is always the case with products such as this, it's not so much the details as the execution that makes or breaks. Fortunately, *In The Zone 2* manages to get just about everything right. The speed of play, the motion of the players, the switch between animations – yes, it all flows very nicely. The camera views are simple-but-effective, as are the specific 'plays' available to the player via the L and R buttons – pushing computer-controlled team mates into defensive or offensive positions.

As with most of the NBA-related games currently doing the rounds, all of the teams and star players are included; with each face replicated as accurately as the PlayStation seems able (which, if we're honest, isn't very good, and if anything borders on scary!). Another feature we've come to expect with any sport sim is the selection of statistics, and thanks to the NBA's unique method of scoring for leagues and competitions (ie based on percentages) there are screen after screen to keep even the most accountant-like punter smiling.



EACH MATCH STARTS WITH THE TALLEST OF THE TALL JUMPING UP TO GAIN THE ADVANTAGE FROM THE TIP-OFF...

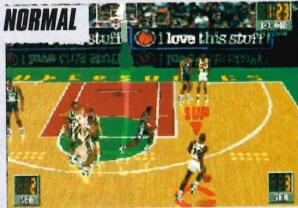
WHAT'S YOUR PLEASURE?

I don't think I've ever managed to write up a basketball game review (and let's face it, there have been a few!) without coming back to the basic fact that, while games like *In The Zone 2* display a very high level of attention to detail, fine-tuned controls and basic quality, whether it's the product for you really boils down to one thing – do you actually like basketball? I myself have never been a major follower of basketball (and the interest I do have probably only comes as a



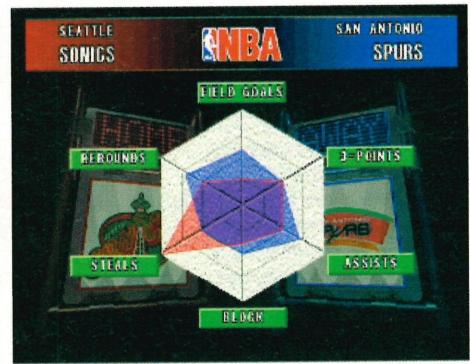
THROUGH THESE EYES

In *The Zone 2* offers the player a number of camera positions to view the action through. The 'live' camera is an intelligent view, automatically zooming in and out of the play as well as panning to give a very dramatic and directed view. The 'normal' view is the more traditional Konami camera (taken from ageing basket-fest, *Give 'n' Go*) that simply follows the players up and down the court vertically. The 'side' view is a similarly simple camera, rolling up and down the side of the court, keeping the action as central as possible, while the final view – the 'quarter' view – gives an isometric-ish view of play, and makes for some very attractive replays.



Opinion I always stood on the side of *In The Zone* when the first batch of basketball games did battle, and with this sequel Konami have ensured my continuing support. It's slick, highly playable, good fun, and damned attractive to boot. Being able to call plays gives you that extra feeling of control, while the animations and various camera views offer enough graphical rewards to hold your interest until you're well and truly hooked. Top stuff indeed.

No SELF-RESPECTING PLAYSTATION SPORTS SIMULATION WOULD DARE TO DENY YOU THE 'WACKY' STATISTICS YOU LOVE, SO IN THE ZONE 2 GOES BEYOND SATISFYING, WITH PERCENTAGES AND STAT' TABLES LITERALLY POURING FROM EVERY ORIFICE. ER... ENJOY!



result of playing all these computer versions!) and though I can't pretend to have not enjoyed reviewing most of the basketball games released, I doubt I'll return to them as often as I would to, say, a footy game or a decent beat 'em up simply because I don't have the same general level of interest in the genre.

It's a pretty obvious point I know, but one that's worth making simply because, if you're only out for a decent two-player sports bash, or even just a basketball-related laugh, you might want to also look at the less serious

releases (Acclaim's *NBA Jam Extreme*, for instance) before wading into what is ultimately a very accurate sports simulation. Still, let's not forget that the door swings both ways, so anyone who is into basketball will certainly be thrilled with *In The Zone 2*.

PSP RATING...

**Graphics : 89
Animation : 89
Sound FX : 86
Music : ??
Lastability : 87
Playability : 90**

90

Space Jam

1ove them or loath them, games based on film releases are definitely here to stay. Ready made plots and large scale advertising campaigns take much of the pressure out of game development, right off the bat ensuring widespread publicity and a pool of potential customers who already identify with the product. Unfortunately these factors have nothing to do with the quality of the finished product, and many tie-ins have turned out to be truly dire games; either because the film style was inappropriate or because translation across the formats wasn't handled very well.

Die Hard Trilogy is one of the few such games that rather stylishly pulls the whole concept off, thanks to a couple of twists to the original plot and some fine programming.

The latest tie-in to hit the shops is *Space Jam*, from the stables of Warner Brothers. In the flick live footage and animation mix, as Michael Jordan teams up with cartoon legends such as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Porky Pig, playing basketball against a mutant monster team. Family fun in an expensive, American vacation kind of way. But where does the game stand?

EARLY LEARNING

Space Jam sells itself as a kind of cartoon basketball sports sim with bonus sub level



Release : MARCH '97

Company : ACCLAIM

Price : £44.95

Players : 1-2

Genre : SPORT SIM



FOREPLAY AT CLOSE QUARTERS

BEFORE PLAY BEGINS IN THE EACH OF THE QUARTERS, 60 SECOND SUB-GAMES CAN BE PLAYED TO INCREASE THE ABILITIES OF THE PLAYERS IN YOUR CHOSEN TEAM.



HALL OF HI JINK

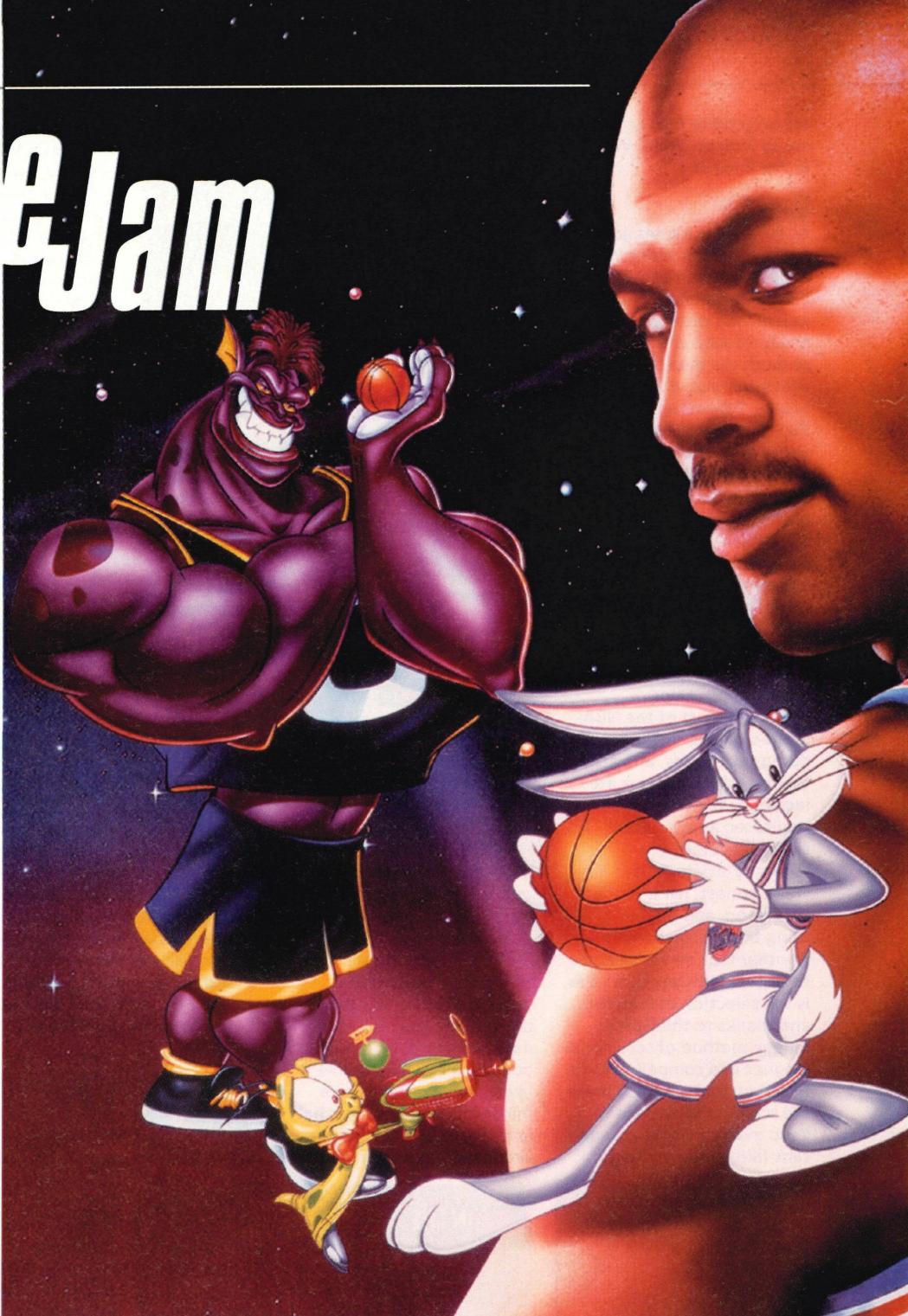
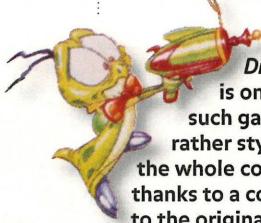
As balls come bouncing towards your character rebound them into your enemy or into targets moving along a conveyor belt - kind of a mix between a fair-ground stall and the *Generation Game*.

SHOOT OUT

Areas marked on the court floor denote the points scored when you successfully sink a basket, ranging from two and 20. Shooting from a moving coloured spot means a doubling bonus if you hit the target.

DID YOU KNOW...

THE FILM SPACE JAM BEGAN LIFE AS A 30 SECOND COMMERCIAL FOR NIKE, STARRING MIKE AND BUGS. Originally shown on US television, the advertisement also made appearances in British living rooms. Feedback from audiences showed how people loved the idea, leading Warner Brothers to sink millions into a full length feature film.





games breaking up action between quarters. These include a rocket race, certain shower and comfy living room antics and various shoot-outs. Only two teams are available, so forget the idea of competing in any kind of complicated league. On one side stands the Tune Squad, comprising Mr Air himself and 11 of Warner's best known creations. On the other side of the court are the Monstars, just five of them, and unrecognisable unless you've seen the film.

Depending on the type of game selected from the options screen, two or three players can be picked from these lists, with stats individually provided on speed, shooting and rebound abilities. A quick glance reveals that Toon characters appear to have the sporting edge. Once chosen the players step onto the court and perform amusing tricks whilst waiting for their colleagues to arrive.

SORE POINTS

Hoop related action begins, not surprisingly, with a face



off and sadly it's instantly apparent that the game has many flaws and faults. Grabbing the ball in the first place appears to be down to luck and once it is in your hands, control of the player is slow and cumbersome. To score, simply rush towards the net and shoot, as passing the ball seems to make very little difference. The awkward controls meant that I was worried more than once by players suddenly veering off towards the sidelines, until I realised it's impossible to step out of bounds.

Here we hit another sore point – although the game clearly intends to be some kind of wacky sim, even the most basic elements of this genre have been omitted. The ball cannot be thrown out of bounds, time restraints have been relaxed, there are no rules against back court passing and fouling simply isn't possible. Would younger players have been put off by the addition of such features? I think in this instance the abilities of early gamers have been underestimated.

UGLY BLOKE

Screenshots show how overwhelmingly colourful the game is, but the graphics on



BRIGHTLY COLOURED GRAPHICS INCLUDING ALL OF WARNER BROTHER'S BEST KNOWN CHARACTERS. CUTE AND SOMETIMES AMUSING, BUT BADLY LET DOWN BY THE GAMEPLAY. WILL THE LICENSE ALONE ENSURE SALES?

Opinion As the PlayStation packs come down in price we can expect younger owners and therefore more games aimed at this age group. Let's just hope that future releases of this kind avoid the mistake made by *Space Jam*, which lacks any kind of long term appeal. Only consider purchasing this game for toddlers!

JM

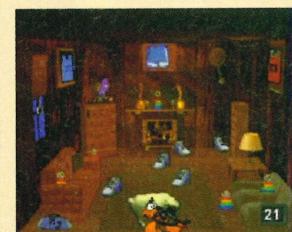
the whole are rather unconvincing. Characters are recognisable: even those in the audience have made regular appearances in Warner Brother cartoons; but the use of too few frames leads to jerky movements, and the court itself affords no feeling of depth. Computer controlled players also have a tendency to run into each other, ending up in bundles where individuals are

indiscernible. In the looks department the game is a bit of a Peter Beardsley.

Each of the players does have some form of special dunking ability, for instance Bugs perches on top of the backboard chewing a carrot after his special scoring move. Using sub-games to provide team power-ups is also a nice touch. Ultimately though these add little to gameplay and are just decorations on an inedible cake.

Commentary is clear but limited and sound effects are dull and do not live up to their cartoon heritage, also the accompanying soundtrack is rather annoying, so all in all there appears to be little available to rescue this game from being a bit of a waste of money.

Some reviewers might suggest that youngsters may still enjoy *Space Jam*, but only to the extent that it is a licensed product and therefore includes very colourful Warner Brother mascots. A badly executed film conversion that unfortunately looks and sounds like a 16bit game and plays like a dog.



SPACE RACE

Pilot your rocket ship around a course of cones, avoiding the asteroids, lasers and pop-up walls, collecting bullets, and flying over speed-ups. Get far enough ahead to detonate your adversary in true *Micro Machines* style.

LOCKER ROOM

Avoid a variety of exploding items whilst searching through other peoples' lockers to pinch water bottles – is this ethical? If playing as the Monstar team, use a sickly coloured cloud of gas to sap your opponent's energy.

DAFFY'S QUAKED CAPER

Collect smiling Mike's trainers whilst avoiding an oversized pooch. And watch out for a small blue creature that likes to hide in your draws! For some reason there is no Monstar Team version of this sub-game.

PSP RATING...

Graphics : 70
Animation : 68
Sound FX : 70
Music : 65
Lastability : 55
Playability : 56

65

Media

MORE ITEMS OF **MERCHANDISE** CURRENTLY AVAILABLE THAT WE BELIEVE WILL BE OF INTEREST TO **PLAYSTATION GAMERS** EVERYWHERE.

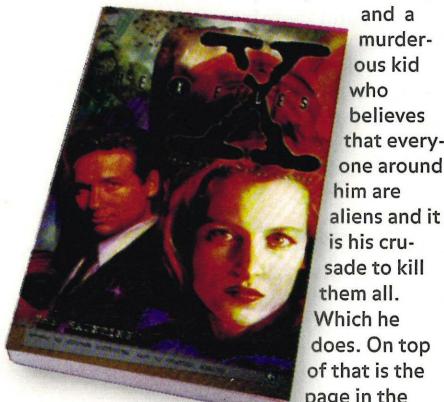
THE X-FILES
CONTINUES ITS
PRINTED
ADVENTURES,
WHILE **BART**
SIMPSON
TAKES A BREAK
FROM HIS
DATED BBC
ESCAPADES,
WHILE
AMALGAMATED
COMICS SPAWN
IDEAS FOR THE
GAME DEVELOPERS IN THE
FUTURE. ALL
THIS AND MORE
PLAYSTATION-
RELATED MER-
CHANDISE
(**SORT OF**).

BOOKS

X-FILES: THE HAUNTING

BY: TITAN BOOKS
PRICE: £9.99
RATING: ★★★★

Titan's latest collection of X-Files comic strips deserves an **adventure** content a full five out of five as this is the most intriguing and daring collection so far. By far the best story is the opening one about Eve – as in Adam 'n' – and whether or not the skeleton discovered by archaeologists is hers. Apart from the scientific and theological repercussions, the effect the discovery has on the people involved in the dig is little short of dazzling, as one might expect. The other few stories in this collection are equally well-written, if a little more 'traditional' X-Files material (hmmm, can anything really be "traditional" and X-Files at the same time) but what lets some of it down is the artwork. Charlie Adlard once again supplies a majority of the art but was clearly on an off-day when he drew Falling while Claude St. Aubin's pencils on The Silent Blade seem far removed from the appropriateness of Adlard's normal dark and doomy work. Apart from the Eve story, there is an adventure about a computer going wrong that has initial similarities to the TV episode Ghost in the Machine but quickly sheds them,

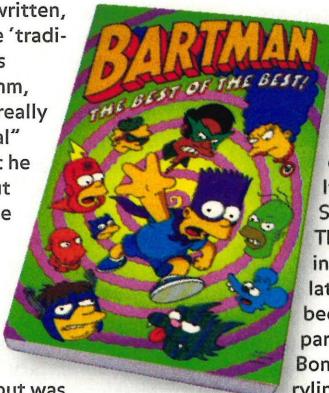


and a murderous kid who believes that everyone around him are aliens and it is his crusade to kill them all. Which he does. On top of that is the page in the

book with the words Deny Everything written on it, a well-known X-Files catchphrase, but one which has a little™ next to it. So, you can trademark phrases and words in the English language now can you? How very, well, X-Files in itself! Overall, however, this has to be the strongest collection of the lot so far, and seems to more than justify Titan's taking on of the series.

BARTMAN: THE BEST OF THE BEST

BY: TITAN BOOKS
PRICE: £6.99
RATING: ★★



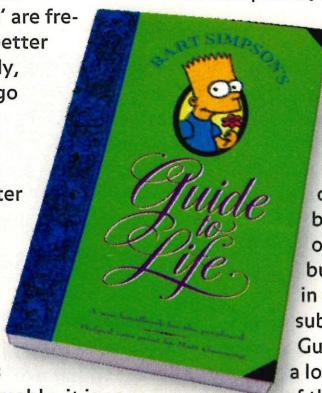
Without a doubt, the weakest of the Simpsons graphic novel collections so far, dipping into the first three issues of the Bartman comic, as well as one issue of The Simpsons and one issue of Itchy and Scratches. The reason for the inclusion of the latter two is because they form part of the When Bongos Collide storyline that stretched through all the

Bongo Comics titles a couple of years back. Undoubtedly Bongos' worst moment, the storyline is neither amusing nor particularly clever as pastiches of Marvel and DC Comics 'events' are frequently done better and more wittily, usually by Bongo themselves. Perhaps the biggest flaw in this is Bart's alter ego Bartman himself, a concept rarely used in the TV show after its initial couple of appearances because, presumably, it is so lame. What always makes the Simpsons work so well is that despite its ludicrous moments, the family are grounded pretty much in reality. Bartman is a

side-step away from that and so simply doesn't hold up to close examination. Whilst this collection at least plugs the gap in the reprinting of the early issues of Bongos' titles, it does leave you wishing for a decent collection of Itchy and Scratches, as well as a long-overdue reprinting of the Radioactive Man titles and feeling that this bundle of reprints smacks of desperation. Which it may well be as it was first published in the States two years ago and yet Titan are only just putting it out now.

BART SIMPSON'S GUIDE TO LIFE

BY: HARPER COLLINS
PRICE: £9.99
RATING: ★★



One of the very first bits of Simpson's merchandise, issued in 1993 gets a long-overdue UK publication to tie in with the Beeb's delightfully out-of-sequence showing of the premier season on Saturday nights. This is one of those books that sways from downright hilarious to downright bad in the space of one age turn. Some of the jokes are clever, usually those pastiching the books of the same genre, while some of the humour is so far off the mark as to be excruciating. It does rather seem that the best stuff is at the start of the book, so if you find yourself stating to go 'Oh dear' halfway through, with a couple of exceptions, it doesn't get

any better. What is actually far more interesting to Simpsons-philes are some of the jokes that changed slightly before turning up on the TV show but are seen here in a rawer, less subtle tone. The Guide to Life lacks a lot of the charm of the comic collections but is nevertheless an interesting little book and its timely emergence in the shops is perhaps a slight foretaste of the anarchy that seems

inevitable if the show captures the minds of the public and the merchandise spewers over the next couple of months.

THE AMALGAM AGE OF COMICS

BY: BOXTREE
PRICE: £10.99
RATING: ★★★

Every so often someone in the US comics field comes up with an idea that sounds a real bummer on paper but extraordinarily, it works. Last year's Amalgam Comics run-about was just one such idea. Many times in their history have DC and Marvel teamed their heroes up in alternative realities so that Batman can thump the Hulk or Superman can take on Spider-Man, but this is the first time they've literally taken the best of both worlds and glued them together to become a whole third. On top of that, there is a charming pretence that this has been an on-going comics universe for years, that each of these characters have long-running histories etc. So, we take Superboy and Spider-Man, amalgamate them and we have Spider-Boy. Or The Flash and Ghost Rider for a dose of Speed Demon. You get the idea. Split now into two collections, Boxtree's offering gives us the two mentioned above plus Bruce Wayne, now an agent of SHIELD, aided by Moonwing, a combination of DC's Nightwing and Marvel's Moon Knight. They face Hydra (SHIELD's oldest foe) led by the Green Skull and his daughter Selina Luthor. In a nice in-joke SHIELD's boss Nick Fury is teamed up with Sergeant Rock – back in the Sixties the two were each company's answer to the other as WWII heroes.



Other tales contained here see Diana Prince (normally known as Wonder Woman but not here) teamed with Frank Castle's Punisher to form Bullets and Bracelets. The X-

Men/Justice League universes are represented by, ironically enough, the two least successful stories, one feature X-Patrol, the other starring Magneto and the Magnetic Men, neither of which work because too much time is spent trying to intertwine DC/Marvel characters (ie we end up with the preposterously named Shatterstarfire). Overall, the Amalgam Universe fracas was a bit of fun and Boxtree's collection is mostly a successful bunch. Next issue we'll look at Titan's collection, concentrating on the more DC-influenced type of stories.

STAR TREK CHRONOLOGY

by Michael and Denise Okuda

BY: POCKET BOOKS
PRICE: £14.99
RATING: ★★★★

A surprisingly cheap price to pay for what is one of the largest, heaviest and most essential Star Trek factual books around. This newly-revised version takes us into First Contact as well as the most recent Deep Space Nine and Voyager episodes, creating, as the title suggests, a long guide to the fictional universe of Star Trek by date. What is nice in this edition are many of the authors' notes, whereby they acknowledge that certain events in Trek contradict each other and they explain why they have adopted one 'truth' over another. Or, in the case of First Contact, how the film

does slightly alter previously established Trek lore but not unforgivably so and points out the authors' errors in the previous edition.

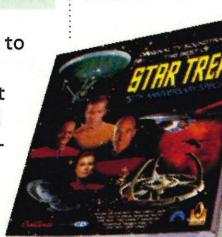
Gorgeously illustrated with stills and grabs from the episodes mentioned, it is a lavish labour of love and is nothing short of magnificent. Apart from the day by day explanations for Trek, there are also character biogs at the back, listing everything known about the characters and from which episodes the information was gleaned and why. Did you know that Uhura is the only Star Trek regular not to have been given a Christian name

yet? Or that Sulu is possibly still alive a few years before Voyager is set? This is quite honestly the best book upon the subject of Star Trek out there to date, especially in this updated form and is certainly well-worth the money, even for a casual viewer of Star Trek just to see exactly how carefully controlled (and occasionally uncontrolled) Star Trek's script writers have steered the show over thirty years.

CDS STAR TREK - 30TH ANNIVERSARY ALBUM

BY: CRESCEDO RECORDS
PRICE: £13.99
RATING: ★★★★

Trek music fans owe a great debt to Crescendo mastermind Neil Norman because over the



last few years, he has been responsible for issuing some of the best soundtrack recordings on the market. His feel for Star Trek and what makes the music so good is to be loudly applauded, yet when I first glanced at this, I thought 'Oh dear, cash-in compilation time'. How wrong I was. Everything here is new (bar a couple of themes), and in addition to the music comes a CD-ROM portion with clips from the shows, previews of the computer games (Star Trek: Borg looks quite excellent) and other nice visuals. This 'enhanced music CD' thing seems to be all the rage these days, each one getting better and better. Musically though, we have the suite from The Trouble with Tribbles to represent the original series, while The Next Generation has the stirring Heart of Glory (good music, shame about the episode) plus the glorious Inner Light stabs. Deep Space

Nine features the godawful Season 4 theme (yo, dude, dance version - baad!) plus music from the Emmy nominated The Visitor. An extended Voyager theme precedes music from the nauseous Heroes and Demons which, strangely, shows that even the music

takes from the generally weaker second season, are so below par, it isn't true. Eternal Youth has a plot better suited to one of the Harley Quinn stories as Poison Ivy lacks any real sense of maliciousness or evil intent while House

couldn't lift this show from the depths of awfulness. All in all, though, a great album and a genuine surprise. But more should have been done with the cover to make it look less like a cheap cash-in.

TUNES FROM THE TOONS****

BY: MUSIC CLUB
PRICE: £4.99
RATING: ★★★★

Inexpensive and invaluable, after the expensive US box set of Hanna Barbera themes reviewed a few issues back, a UK compilation finally sees the light of day, featuring opening and closing themes for the best of the HB cartoons from the Sixties and Seventies. Dastardly and Muttley, Wacky Races, Scooby Doo, Help, it's the Hair Bear Bunch, Penelope Pitstop all sit alongside the now traditional Jetsons, Flintstones and Yogi Bear themes making this an essential purchase. Forget buying it for your kids, by it for yourself. Not only will you be able to learn the names of

the Banana Splits

gang by heart, but you'll hear the dulcet tones of Scatman Carruthers giving us the full

story of Hong Kong Phooey and

hear Cheryl Ladd yowl about

being one of Josie and the

Pussycats. Marvellous track, every one of them.



VIDEOS BATMAN - POISON IVY*

BY: WARNER BROS VIDEO
£6.99
RATING: ★★★★

A prediction not that long ago in his very magazine, Poison Ivy, star of the forthcoming Batman and Robin movie, gets her very own collection of the animated, and terrific, Batman Adventures show. Sadly, the

two stories here, one taken from the generally weaker second season, are so below par, it isn't true. Eternal Youth has a plot better suited to one of the Harley Quinn stories as Poison Ivy lacks any real sense of maliciousness or evil intent while House

and Garden is just a laughable re-tread of every Scooby Doo adventure to feature mad botanists and their people-eating plants. No, after the general excellence of the other releases, this is a bit of a disappointment. Bearing in mind that Poison Ivy doesn't have the public awareness of characters such as the Joker, the Riddler and the Penguin, this isn't a very good precursor to the new movie, and one feels that a lot will ride on whatever characterisation Arnie puts into Mister Freeze. Oh. Oh well, nice idea while it lasted...

DOCTOR WHO - THE LEISURE HIVE

BY: BBC VIDEO
PRICE: £12.99
RATING: ★★★★★

After a glut of truly dodgy Who videos put out by the BBC over the last few years, here comes an Eighties classic that frankly helped re-invent the show and kept it alive for another ten years (prior to this, it was approaching a sad

death far more than it ever

was in 1989 when it did breath

its last). It's very difficult to

find anything wrong with The

Leisure Hive. It looks smart,

expensive, superbly directed

and with sets many other SF

shows would die for. It is uni-

formly well-acted, the music

for once helping the

tension and of partic-

ular note are the

underplayed hyster-

ics of Pangol, the

saviour of the plan-

et Argolis and the

panic of the

human scientist

Hardin who has

lied and cheat-

ed his way to

Argolis to be

with the

women he

loves, inadvert-

ly betraying her into the bar-

gain. Politically motivated, the

aliens (possibly the only down-

er to the story as visually they

don't really work) are there for

reasons of money and power

rather than basic B-movie

world domination. Only the

final few moments let it down

as, once all is resolved, some

silly jokes and in-the-nick-of-

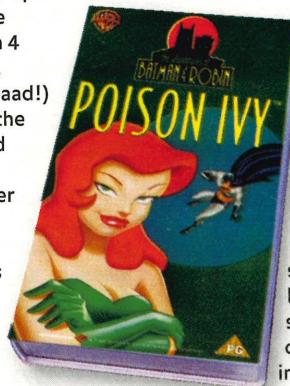
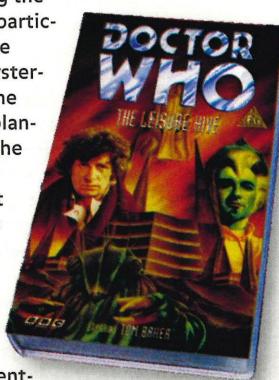
time escapes tarnish the clos-

ing scenes, but Tom Baker and

Lalla Ward as Romana have

rarely been on better form. A

definite must-buy.



Plus Points

SEND YOUR **VIEWS AND COMMENTS TO:**
PLUS POINTS, PLAYSTATION PLUS, PRIORY COURT, 30-32
FARRINGDON LANE, LONDON, EC1R 3AU
SMERRETT-IMAGES@MAIL.U-NET.COM

Better Late Than Never?

I started buying your magazine around nine months ago, for the simple reason that I recently bought a PlayStation. I wanted a loose guide to help me get to know the PlayStation better (the tips pages and the Plus Points pages are also very interesting).

Anyway, my point is, that two or three issues ago I read in a review that *Destruction Derby 2*'s release date was to be November. Brilliant I thought, so I sold my copy of *Destruction Derby* to make way for the newer version, but when I went to my local dealer, the bloke behind the counter told me that the game in question was not to be released until the New Year!!! So I went home and put my head in a pillow and screamed for half an hour. Now I'm not going to be able to play *Destruction Derby* one or two for a couple of months thanks to you lot!

I'm still going to buy your magazine as it's the best one I can find, although I will be cautious when reading any reviews in future. May I also point out that this is not an isolated incident.

James Hetfield, Yorkshire

*Delays in release dates do nobody any favours, but there's nothing we can actually do about it. *Destruction Derby 2* was only reviewed because Psygnosis had confirmed it was final code and was indeed due for a late November release. However, literally hours after the issue containing the review had gone to press, Psygnosis told us that it would miss Christmas due to a revision of duplication slots by Sony. We try to be as accurate as possible, but sometimes these things are just out of our hands.*

FIFA Own Goal

Having just played *FIFA '97* I have to disagree with your review score of 64% (December Issue). Personally I think the game deserves barely half that figure. For me, you can have all the gloss, presentation and



atmosphere in the world, but if the players act, feel and perform like machines then it's not worth the bother. US Gold's *Olympic Soccer* remains the best example of gameplay over gloss and I recommend it to fans who want a real football game.

Irritating as it is to see *FIFA '97* at the top of the charts, this is unfortunately inevitable with hyped games – especially at Christmas, even though this will only encourage EA and others to carry on creating foot-ball games with poor gameplay.

Just one quibble with the review, it stated that the players acted like that of Plymouth Argyle. Well I happen to be an Argyle supporter and although the greens are fairly dab at the moment, they are not *FIFA '97* bad, surely! Roll on *Olympic 2*.

Jim Instone, Hertfordshire

*The most frustrating thing about *FIFA '97* is that it had such potential. In the rare moments when a player is under control enough to respond and pulls off a stunning volley or bicycle kick, it looks superb. But sadly, the rest of the game is so sluggish and unplayable that these rare*

glimpses are too few and far between. Needless to say, US Gold are indeed set to monopolise on EA's own goal.

Dog-eared

Please could you help me, I have recently bought a PlayStation and with it I bought *Resident Evil*, *Soviet Strike*, *Tomb Raider*, *FIFA '97* and *Actua Soccer*. The very same week, my Mum bought a puppy and whilst I was playing on my PlayStation (with the games and manuals all over the floor), I was that enthralled with the game I didn't realise that our new puppy was chewing my manuals to pieces.

I am now finding it difficult to learn each game without the instruction manual. Please, please could you help me or tell me where I can get replacement manuals from. Or maybe you could photocopy your manuals and send them to me?

Gary Blackburn, Cleveland

*A sorry tale indeed, but try calling EA (01753 549442) for the *FIFA* and *Soviet Strike* manuals, Virgin (0171 368 2255) for *Resident Evil*, Gremlin (01142 753423) for *Actua*, and Core Design (01332 297797) for *Tomb**

Raider. They should all have spare copies of the manuals.

The Obligatory SWOS

I am a really big football fan and I have *Sensible World of Soccer* on the Amiga. Do you know if this game will be coming out on the PlayStation and if so, when? Hardcore.

Warner no longer exist as a stand-alone company, having been bought out by GT Interactive. And there are still plans for SWOS on the PlayStation.

A Fair Point Well Made

I am writing about the comments made by Andrew Taylor about Aaron Doig (Plus Points, issue 3). Just because someone doesn't like a particular game, it doesn't make them a "stupid tosser". I myself don't like *Resident Evil* and I do "live in the 90s", just like Aaron. Maybe there is only a small percentage of people who don't like the popular *Resident Evil*, but believe me, they're certainly not tossers.

Luke Pare, Halifax

*Yeah, but people who like *On-Side Soccer*, that's different...*

Expansion Opportunities

Firstly, let me wish you all a happy new year!

I recently bought a PlayStation as I was getting bored with my PC, and all I can say is Wow! I knew that it was good but it has far outdone my expectations of what it could do. I then bought your magazine which I must say, is very well put together. Anyway, the reason I write is to ask a question. Please excuse my ignorance.

I have seen in some PlayStation mags that a few companies are offering a Chipping service which will allow you to play Japanese and US games on British machines. Do these chips work? and do they affect the performance of the machine or the warranty?

Glenn Wellstead, Dorset

The chips on offer do indeed

LAST MONTH'S
164-PAGE
ISSUE, ACTED
AS A COMPLETE
GUIDE TO
FORTHCOMING
RELEASES IN
1997.



allow you to play import games on a UK machine, and yes they work. However, opening the machine to insert one will invalidate any existing warranty, and the gap between UK and NTSC code is getting much smaller, so it's up to you. You pays yer money, you takes yer choice.

Problems, Problems

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter which I have sent to Sony UK, expressing my increasing annoyance with duff PlayStations. I would welcome any comments you may have on the subject and would also like to know if there are more unfortunate owners like me out there?

The letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir,
Having owned Sony products for a while now (RDS Car Stereo, CD Discman and a Walkman) I decided on buying a PlayStation (after many sleepless nights trying to decide whether to get a Saturn or a PlayStation). So I bought my first PlayStation from the Silica shop in Manchester on 30th September 1995. On the 17th October 1995 I went back to the shop to get a replacement joy pad, as the original one had developed a fault (the direction buttons would not operate correctly). This was replaced and everything seemed OK until December, when the PlayStation itself developed a fault. The music and graphics on certain games started to jump when the machine had warmed up (most noticeable on *Jumping Flash*). I returned the machine to the shop and was given a replacement under guarantee.

My second PlayStation was fine for 11 months, working without any problems whether it was cold or hot. Then in November 1996 it developed a fault very similar to the first one. The music began jumping and skipping on various games (*Tekken II* in particular). This time the fault would happen whether the machine was cold or hot, but it did not do it all the time and sometimes if you switched the machine off then back on it would rectify itself. So I phoned Silica again who said they could not now replace the machine as it was 11 months old and gave me a phone number for the Sony helpdesk. I spoke to various people at Sony who

informed me that I could have a 'factory reconditioned unit' to replace mine. At the time I said I would rather have a brand new unit instead, as I was a bit fed up. I was informed by yourselves that it is not company policy to supply new units, but the 'reconditioned' ones have all new internals inside and old case and to the human eye they look like new from the factory units, so reluctantly I agreed to have one sent out to me.

The courier brought my third PlayStation while I was out, so my Mum checked it over and signed for it. When I returned home I checked the case etc. for any damage, everything seemed fine, until I took the joy pad out of the bag. It was rather dirty around the buttons, had sticky toffee on the case and also a deep scratch in it. So what, I thought, as long as the machine works! I eagerly dashed upstairs, plugged it in, placed *Tekken II* in the drive and it worked. For a while anyway. After playing for about 10 minutes I then reset the machine and played a music CD. I then reinserted *Tekken II* and it was absolutely dreadful, skipping and jumping all over the place! Far worse than any of my other units. I am now getting to the point where I feel I am banging my head against a rather bloody hard wall! I am also the proud owner of an Amiga A500, Amiga A1200, Amiga CD32 and also a Panasonic 3DO. None of which to this day have let me down. It seems a shame that the best games console out of all of them has these recurring faults. Where do I stand now? At this point I would like another brand new unit, with new joy pad etc. as the one I have got is not fit for the purpose that it is intended.

Paul Lambert, Lancashire

A full report on similar problems is being looked into at the moment, but it does seem as if you're having more problems than most.



FORGET ARGUMENTS ABOUT PAL BORDERS, IMPORT GAMES, AND THE PRICE OF SOFTWARE. THE CURRENT DEBATE IS WHETHER PEOPLE WHO LIKE RESIDENT EVIL ARE TOSSESS. GO FIGURE.

FAQ

THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF THE MONTH ARE, ONCE AGAIN, MET WITH STRAIGHT ANSWERS.

Q I am enjoying the continued coverage of *Resident Evil 2* in your magazine, and in particular the large piece in the 1997 preview. However, I am dismayed that Capcom don't seem to want to commit themselves to a release date. Bearing in mind the considerable delay between Japanese and UK releases, can you confirm a release date for the game yet?

A When we visited Capcom's R'n'D offices during the 1997 Preview issue, we saw a 50% complete version of the game. However, what you must bear in mind, was that the 50% of the code complete was actually the basic coding duties (map design, sprite handling, etc), and what remained was the inclusion of backdrops and sprites. While this isn't an easy task, it is more time-consuming than complex, and the level of detail used in the Resident Evil games means that light-sourcing and bug-testing will take longer than usual. Capcom are perfectionists, and see *Resident Evil 2* as an important avenue for them, and want to get it absolutely right. The Japanese version is likely to appear in the Summer, and bearing in mind how quickly Virgin shipped Capcom's *Star Gladiator* conversion into the UK (a month between the NTSC and PAL release dates), *Resident Evil 2* could appear for a September release.

Q Who decides whether games released in Japan or the US will be released in the UK? If it's down to the quality of releases, why do we get the likes of *Penny Racers* (Choro Q) and *Galaxian 3*?

A Software houses have a constant eye on the Japanese market for new releases, while the likes of Capcom and Namco are equally keen to have their games released in the UK. The likes of Virgin and Sony will then approach the relevant company and agree terms to distribute the said titles over here, either on an individual title basis, or in batches. As such, Virgin will get the cream of the Capcom crop, including the *Resident Evil*, *Street Fighter*, and *Star Gladiator* series, but will also be obliged to release, say, *MegaMan*. Acclaim have a similar deal with Taito, wherein they get the *Bubble Bobble* games, but have to take some of the company's weaker blasters. Some software houses prefer to opt for one release at a time, though, with Vic Tokai stepping in for Criticom, and Acclaim release Capcom's *Street Fighter: The Movie*. The deal also works the other way, with Eidos licensing *Tomb Raider* for release in Japan, and Psygnosis titles being equally popular.

Q I recently saw a PlayStation version of *Mortal Kombat II* in an import shop. I seem to remember your magazine stating that the code had been scrapped, yet the copy I bought has got Acclaim on the box, and is also developed by Probe. As a big fan of the *Mortal Kombat* series, I was extremely pleased to add the game to my collection (although the conversion is rather bland), but would rather get my hands on a PAL version if at all possible. Was it released for UK machines in the end, or just for the Japanese market?

A *Mortal Kombat II* was all set to be released for the PlayStation in October 1995, but with the imminent arrival of Sony's *Mortal Kombat 3* conversion, Acclaim decided against releasing the second game which would look dated. However, Acclaim's Japanese division were keen to see the code released over there, and Probe's newly-completed code was handed over, and released a year ago. The code is identical to Acclaim UK's sluggish *Saturn* version, but there are no plans for a release over here unless Acclaim follow through with a proposed idea to bundle *Mortal Kombat* and *Mortal Kombat II* on one CD.

Next Month

Syndicate Wars

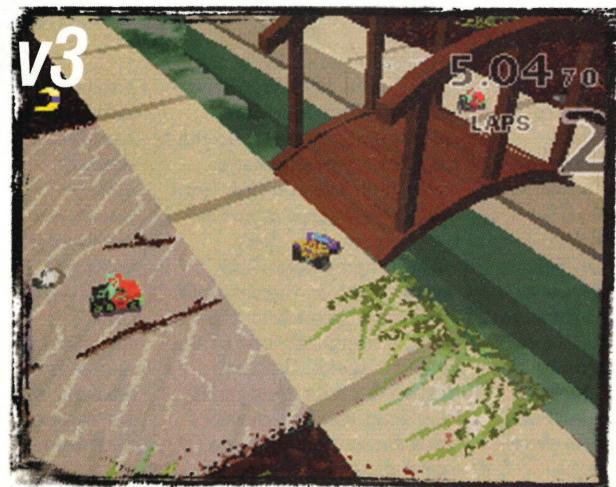
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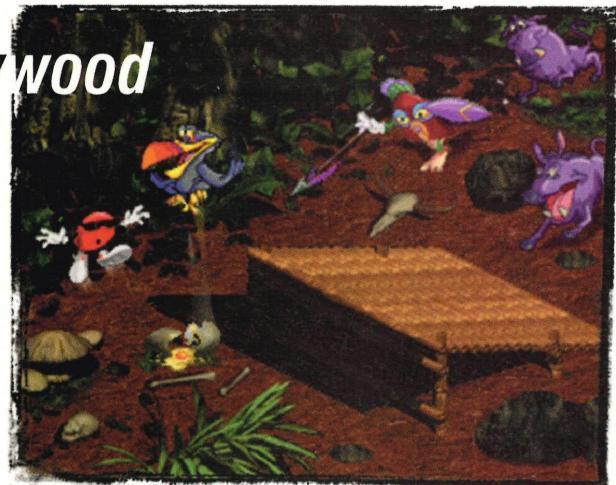
Micro Machines

A REGULAR VISITOR TO THIS PAGE, WE ARE FINALLY IN RECEIPT OF FINAL MICRO MACHINES V3 CODE. TIPPED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST PLAYABLE GAMES OF THE YEAR, CODEMASTER HAVE UPDATED THE MEGADRIVE RACER BEYOND ALL RECOGNITION WITH THE 3D COURSES AND STUNNING CAMERA WORK. WITH THE LEAMINGTON COMPANY RENOWNED FOR THEIR PLAYABLE GAMES, CAN THEY TRANSLATE THE SKILLS TO THE SONY MACHINE?



Spot Goes To Hollywood

WITH MORE DELAYS THAN BRITISH RAIL, SPOT GOES TO HOLLYWOOD IS FINALLY COMPLETE. VIRGIN'S US DEVELOPERS HAVE COME TO THE END OF THEIR MARATHON THREE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PERIOD, AND ALL EYES ARE ON THE FINAL CODE TO SEE WHAT RADICAL ADVANCES WITHIN THE PLATFORM GENRE HAVE BEEN BEHIND THE WAIT. A HANDFUL OF ISOMETRIC WORLDS BASED ON FILM STYLES ARE PROMISED, AND VIRGIN ARE CONFIDENT SPOT WILL REPEAT HIS 16BIT SUCCESS.



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